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Protestants and Prawns

Enchantment and 'The Word' in a Scottish Fishing Village

Joseph Webster

PhD in Social Anthropology

University of Edinburgh

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Declaration

Date: 24th August 2011

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification.

Small parts of the ‘conceptual themes and questions’, ‘literature review’ and ‘recent social themes concerning religion in Scotland’ sections have been adapted and updated from my MScR thesis but have been clearly referenced as such in the main text as well as appearing in the bibliography.

For Mary – a sister in the LORD

Abstract

This thesis attempts to understand what it is like to live and work as a ‘sincere’ and ‘committed’ Christian in Gamrie, a small fishing village of 700 people and six conservative Protestant churches, whose staunch religiosity is itself on the cusp of dramatic economic, social and spiritual change. More than this, it is an attempt to show how the everyday religious experiences of Christians in Gamrie are animated by – but not reducible to – their social context. It seeks to do so by considering how local folk theologies relate to larger social processes occurring within Scotland and the north Atlantic. Arguing that these realms are necessarily (and simultaneously) ideational *and* material, my theoretical focus is upon the relationship between belief and experience – a relationship mediated, first and foremost, in and through the significance of ‘The Word’. Where beliefs have objects and where objects ‘have’ *materiality*, beliefs are held to be essentially material. Equally, where material happenings in the world are framed by theological (say, eschatological) *ideas*, objects and events are held to be unavoidably implicated in belief. Thus, my aim is to present an analytic of the relationship between the lived local experiences of belief and objects, materiality and language.

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Abbreviations

AoG	Assemblies of God
CB	Closed Brethren
CofS	Church of Scotland
EB	Exclusive Brethren
FPCU	Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster
LDS	Latter Day Saints
OB	Open Brethren

A Note on the Text

This thesis contains a considerable amount of ethnography. In order to help the reader distinguish ethnography from theory, I have formatted the ethnography slightly differently from the rest of the text. Ethnographic descriptions appear in a smaller-than-normal font size and are single indented. Direct ethnographic quotes and interview transcripts are in this same smaller size, but are double indented, and, on occasion, are supplemented with in-text descriptions of the emotional state of the speaker. These descriptions appear in bold and in square brackets, appearing after the relevant quotation. Finally, where one distinct passage of ethnography is directly followed by another, they are separated by a triple asterisk.

It will also be noticed that I have made liberal use of single quotation marks throughout the thesis. These have been used in two different but related ways. First, they have been used to mark out local Christian terminology as distinct from the technical language of anthropology. Thus, words such as ‘witness’ and ‘testimony’ normally appear in single quotations, as do phrases such as ‘born-again’ and ‘the last of the last days’. Crucially, such punctuation is not meant to mock – what Cordas refers to as a ‘tongue-in-textual-cheek’ (1994: xii) – but is instead used to create some sense of analytical differentiation (as opposed to privilege) between local folk theology and my own argumentation. Thus, words common to anthropology, such as sacrifice and enchantment, are not framed by single quotations. Second, single quotations are also used when directly quoting informants within a paragraph, or when indirectly reproducing local sentiments (‘you’re never too old for the gospel!’, ‘feasting upon the Word’ and so on) that emerge from a commonly held Christian lexicon. Double quotations are only ever used, then, when presenting quotes within quotes.

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At every stage of planning, fieldwork and writing up, this thesis would not have been possible without the help of many different people.

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Lastly, let me offer a word of apology. As with past research I have undertaken on conservative Protestant communities in Scotland, I am aware that there will be some in Gamrie, who, having shared their lives with me, will receive this thesis and not like what they read. I have tried hard to give a sympathetic account but am anxious that some will deem I have failed.

Introduction

Gamrie, Words, Signs

It was a Monday evening in February of 2009 and nearly the end of what had been a long and unusually cold winter. Having just finished a two hour Bible study on the coming of the Kingdom of God, the half dozen elderly Brethren members who had attended the meeting closed their Bibles and began to share a more informal time of Christian fellowship, chatting over tea and biscuits. As our time together that evening came to an end, one of the leading men prepared to leave by pulling on his reflective jacket. As he did so, I was intrigued to see that he had written on the back of it in modestly sized block capitals the phrase JESUS SAVES. Struck by the inscription and wanting to know more I said: 'I like your jacket Billy! Jesus Saves!' 'Oh...' he said 'I just wrote that on the back so that someone might see it as I go about the village'. 'He's funny isn't he?' his wife said to me beaming with admiration for her husband's quirky way of spreading 'the gospel'. Not wanting to betray the fact that I found Billy's act of 'witness' a little strange, I said 'It's good. I really like it!' 'It *is* good, isn't it?' his wife replied, looking rather more serious than before. I nodded gravely and we left it at that, saying our goodbyes and heading for home.

We are in Gamrie, with Billy, a retired fisherman in his early seventies who had worked his whole life at sea, becoming a successful skipper, and, by most people's standards, a wealthy man. But Billy described himself not only as a fisherman, but also as a Christian. Raised in the Closed Brethren (CB), Billy was 'converted through the preaching of the gospel' and later became a preacher himself. Over time, Billy and his immediate family distanced themselves from the Closed Brethren movement, and, after two local splits, he and a few other local men re-established the Braehead Hall as a small independent church of less than twenty members. Despite old age and ill health, Billy continues to lead Braehead, preach the gospel and 'witness' to all those around him about the saving power of the blood of Jesus. But why did Billy spend two hours on a Monday night studying the Bible? And why was the topic that evening – the soon-to-occur apocalypse – of such immense importance locally? Why did he seek to 'testify' to the message that 'JESUS

SAVES’? And why materialise such a message by inscribing it on his jacket? For whom were those words intended and how did he imagine they would take effect?

In asking questions such as these, this thesis attempts to understand what it is like to live and work as a ‘sincere’ and ‘committed’ Christian in Gamrie, a small fishing village of 700 people and six conservative Protestant churches, whose staunch religiosity is itself on the cusp of dramatic economic, social and spiritual change. More than this, it is an attempt to show how the everyday religious experiences of Christians in Gamrie are animated by – but not reducible to – their social context. It seeks to do so by considering how local folk theologies relate to larger social processes occurring within Scotland and the north Atlantic. Arguing that these realms are necessarily (and simultaneously) ideational *and* material, my theoretical focus is upon the relationship between belief and experience – a relationship mediated, first and foremost, in and through the significance of ‘The Word’. Where beliefs have objects and where objects ‘have’ *materiality*, beliefs are held to be essentially material. Equally, where material happenings in the world are framed by theological (say, eschatological) *ideas*, objects and events are held to be unavoidably implicated in belief. Thus, my aim is to present an analytic of the relationship between the lived local experiences of belief and objects, materiality and language.

By taking such an approach that strongly emphasises the importance of ‘the local’ in framing experience, it may become apparent when reading the thesis that I do not tightly define what religion actually is. Yet this lack of a definition should not be seen as tantamount to a lack of theorisation. Indeed, a major contribution the thesis has sought to make centres around the assertion that what religion is – and how anthropologists theorise what religion is – should be an explicitly local exercise. Thus, if forced to offer a definition of what religion is, my answer would simply be that: *religion is (a) what they ‘say’ it is and (b) what they ‘do’ (when they say they are ‘doing’ religion)*. This is a workable definition within the local context of my own fieldwork in Northeast Scotland because ‘they’ (my informants) do indeed say that they are doing religion, that is, religion is a locally intelligible term that clearly intersects with important concepts within the sociology and anthropology of religion. Crucially, I do not feel that this commitment to

localism is necessarily also a rejection of the comparative project within anthropology. This is the case, as I argue below, insofar as we are able to construct an effective ‘language of perspicuous contrast’ (Taylor 1985: 125) that deploys key concepts in ways that allow for them to exist together ‘as alternative possibilities in relation to some human constants at work in both’ (ibid.). I have applied this same method of thinking and writing not just to anthropological terms drawn from different religious traditions but also more broadly to terms that are used within (and between) anthropology and theology. My comparison then is not just confined to other religions, but is also inclusive of other intellectual disciplines. My use of ‘words’ and ‘The Word’ are obvious examples here, as are my use of ‘signs’, ‘materiality’, ‘sacrifice’, ‘enchantment’ and ‘consubstantiation’ – key concepts that I deploy throughout the thesis, not only as analytical tools in their own right, but also as a way of bringing my Christian informants into a conversation with other Christian and ‘non-Christian’ traditions, while also attempting some dialogue between anthropology and theology.

Beyond this fairly broad ‘writing-as-a-method-of-comparison’ approach, my contribution in this thesis is mainly restricted to the anthropology of religion, and, more specifically, to the emerging sub-field of the anthropology of Christianity. Importantly, any contribution also needs to be seen as a feature of the particular theoretical argument I make about the way in which enchantment makes the world ‘alive with a kind of magic’. While not wanting to pre-empt the substance of my argument too much at this stage, by contending that enchantment ‘works its magic’ by conflating different levels of social and religious experience, my contribution here should be seen as a furthering of Cannell’s suggestion that Christianity has often been wrongly painted as an ‘impossible religion’ of pure transcendence and ‘radical discontinuity’ (2006: 13-14, 43). A key challenge of the thesis, then, is to show how enchantment is enchanting exactly because of its ability to collapse – among other things – the distance between immanence and transcendence. Indeed, where the religion of Gamrie is concerned with the spiritual significance of washing machines, VHS cassettes and fish markets, my contribution will be to suggest that the immanence of words, objects, and signs, can also be seen as a kind of transcendence. In the same way, then, I will also argue that the transcendence of prayer,

‘divine providence’ or ‘spiritual attack’ must also be seen as representing a kind of immanence.

I have chosen to roughly divide what remains of my introduction into five sections. First, I will provide some ethnographic context; a description of the ‘feel’ of the place where I conducted my fieldwork. Second, I will discuss the most general conceptual themes of the thesis – words, signs and enchantment – by showing which anthropological and sociological theories impinge upon my work and in what ways. Third, I will provide a brief overview of the relevant ethnographic literature for my thesis. Fourth, I will give a brief description of my methodology by expanding it beyond the fieldwork to also include the writing of the thesis. It is here that I also discuss the ongoing ‘ethical issues’ of interpretation and self representation. Fifth, I will provide a brief outline of the thesis.

The Village

Gardenstown, locally referred to as Gamrie, is a small fishing village of about 700 people located forty-five miles north of Aberdeen and fifteen miles west of the fishing port of Fraserburgh. The village itself clings to steep braes giving a strange sense that the dwellings could, at any moment, quietly slip down the cliffs and into the sea. During early pre-fieldwork visits to the area I often felt (with some nervousness) that the village itself had a distinctly ‘edge of the world’ feel to it, this sense of isolation being reinforced not only by the fact that the village has almost no mobile phone signal at all, but also by the curious glances visitors attract from inquisitive locals. The main approach road into the village winds its way past a few of the huge ‘fisher mansions’, moving down the brae and twisting off at bizarre angles towards the sea. The road branches at the foot of the cliff, with one track going left through the Seatown to a small, grey shale beach, and another going right, past a series of dilapidated work sheds to the tiny village harbour which is home to the few remaining inshore creel boats that come in and out with their modest daily catches of lobster and crab. The older houses closest to the shore are arranged along narrow streets and feel like they are competing for what little space is available, like plants crowding each other as they grow towards the sunlight.



Fig. 1: Creel sheds on the road to the main part of the village

As you wander up one street and down the next, first past the (now closed) post office, with its window still displaying a few handwritten notices advertising cleaning services and cars for sale, and then past the bakery-cum-general store which sells sticky buns alongside Sellotape, the raucous sound of gulls serves as a constant reminder of the nearness of the sea. Not that such a reminder is ever necessary, with the air smelling of fish, (though not as strongly as it once used to), and strong winds bringing the salty taste of sea spray to the back of your throat. The rhythmic sound of waves breaking against the natural rock and harbour walls – which together close in upon the otherwise open mouth of the bay – give the village a sleepy feel in fair weather and a restless feel in bad. It is the sea and cliffs that define much of Gamrie, then, not only in terms of its striking scenery, but also in terms of its peculiar ambience and physical remoteness.



Fig. 2: Looking down onto the Seatown

When I first arrived in the village I quickly realised that despite the fact that Gamrie was set within a very rural region, (with the newest houses at the top of the brae backing onto acres of farmland (fig. 3), Gamrics were quick to define themselves as a breed apart from their farming neighbours. Farmers were said to have an easy life compared to the working life of fishers – they did not work as long hours, always had the benefit of being near family and home comforts and most importantly, they never had to face the adversities and dangers of the sea. More than this, their moral character was said to be distinctly questionable; they drank heavily and used foul language and always worked on the ‘Lord’s Day’ – ‘Sunday is just another day to them’, one informant told me with a real sense of scandal. To make matters worse, the churches that farmers went to (if they went at all) were thought to be hopelessly ‘liberal’ – ‘they’re nae evangelical, church is just like a social club to them!’, was a common phrase used to write off this section of the community as apostate; ‘their ministers are na saved; they dinna preach the Bible!’



Fig. 3: Farmland east of Gamrie.

Importantly, such rhetoric was also said to be backed by historical precedent. When the ('liberal', 'farmer') Gamrie Parish Church closed in 1992, the normal procedure would have been for the existing membership to simply transfer their 'lines' to the nearest Church of Scotland (CofS) congregation, in this case the ('evangelical', 'fisher') Gamrie Kirk. But the elders at the Gamrie Kirk, convinced that many of those in membership at the Parish Church were 'unsaved', asked them to join not by 'transfer' (a mere bureaucratic formality) but rather by profession of faith, that is, *as if new converts*, by going before the Kirk Session to 'testify' to how they had become 'born again' believers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, all those from the Parish Church refused. Some now attend the (less strongly evangelical) Macduff Parish Church, while many simply stopped attending church all together (this latter reaction further confirming to the Gamrie Kirk Elders that they were right to have been cautious). Those in Gamrie told me this story on several occasions to highlight the 'deep spiritual divide' that was said to exist between the 'worldly' farmers and, (in the words of one of my farming informants), their 'toffee-nosed, holier-than-thou' fisher counterparts.



Fig. 4: Transporting bales east of Gamrie.

This split, although seldom articulated so openly, ran deep and was keenly felt by both sides, even (or perhaps especially) amongst children in the school playground and on the football pitch, where all socialising was conducted along occupational lines. There was almost no intermarriage between the two communities as a result, with country folk said to find husbands and wives at Young Farmers' Clubs and fishers typically courting within the village's Kirks and meeting halls. Fishers and farmers also engaged in different leisure pursuits – farmers frequented pubs inland, in the rural towns and villages, and Gamrie fishers generally avoided such places, instead spending what little time they had onshore at home with family. Fishers and farmers also had different shops. The Gamrie Spar (locally nicknamed Bob's Shoppie) was located in the village itself, sold no alcohol and did not open on a Sunday. The Netherbrae Shop (nicknamed Cloudy's), located a couple of miles out in the country served the farming community, had a large stock of alcohol and was always open on a Sunday.

The link between Gamrie's status as a fishing village (16% of Gamrie's workforce are currently employed in the fishing industry¹ compared with less than 4% in agriculture (SCROL 2001)) and the intensity of its religion is clearly a strong one, and as such, will be an important recurring theme throughout the thesis. Not only is the link strong historically (Brethrenism spread with the return of the herring fleet from England in the 1920s), but also in the present. 'Folk explanations' for why this was the case were everywhere. Most commonly I had it explained to me in terms of the dangers of fishing: going to sea meant risking your life on a daily basis and with men frequently injured or lost overboard, fishermen were said to be uniquely aware of their own mortality and thus their dependence upon God as their saviour in times of peril. Furthermore, where God was said to be 'protector', he was also described to me by locals as 'provider'. Hunting invisible shoals of haddock or cod led men to rely on methods of filling their nets that sometimes fell outside the 'natural' limits of seabed mapping: 'When you're fishing, it's the Lord that puts the fish in... we haul [the nets] every two hours and we have to thank God for what we get, whether it's small or much' was a typical comment from one particular fisherman.

Other local circumstances were said to contribute to the God-fearing character of Gamrie's fishermen – past experiences of serious poverty when fish stocks migrated away from British waters were said to have 'thrown people onto God's mercy'. Stories were told to me of 'godly old ladies receiving a word from God' to leave a pot of soup or a sack of potatoes outside so-and-so's back door only to hear that that particular household had been saved from hunger as a result. Poverty brought on by the precarious nature of making a living from the sea was said to foster not only a keen 'spiritual ear' for 'God's leading and guiding', but also created a close-knit social community that was held together by shared worship as much as by shared hardship: '*Everyone* went to church in those days' people would tell me. Less directly 'spiritual' explanations were also offered to me by locals. Religious intensity also owed much, for example, to physical proximity, which itself was attributed to Gamrie's history as a fishing village. The old fisher cottages (fig. 2), being tightly packed among the descending cliff sides, literally backed

¹ This figure does not take into account the very large numbers of men in Gamrie who are retired fishermen, nor does it include those who were once fishermen but who now work on the oil rigs.

onto one another; by looking out of your kitchen window you might easily see right into someone else's bedroom. This gave rise to a strong sense of a community living in each other's pockets: 'In Gardenstown your neighbours are so close at hand that you hardly need to raise your voice' (Smith 1988: 204) commented one guidebook.

Such nearness was said to intensify the already strongly marked 'small village mentality', with an added layer of public moral surveillance. Certain places and spaces seemed to be monitored with particular closeness: Bob's Shoppie, the doctor's surgery, the harbour, the entrance to the hotel (and, by extension, the pub), and, of course, the Kirk and meeting halls. Local folk always knew where fellow Gamrics had (and had not) been and this was quickly extended to my own movements in and around the village. 'I didn't see you out at the Kirk on Sunday Joe – were you out somewhere else?' or 'How did you get on at the Watt's house – I saw you heading up their drive' were typical lines of questioning. While non-attendance at church was particularly visible, as was frequenting the pub, Gamrics had a more general fascination with other people's business, to the point where many had binoculars resting on their window ledges, ostensibly for looking out to boats in the bay, but which people also used (in my company) to see what others were up to further down the brae. While such surveillance often simply amounted to nosiness and as such is by no means unique to Gamrie or even to small village life in general, the pervasiveness of such scrutiny (with its distinctively moral tone apropos the church and pub) seems also to emerge, as I argue in Chapter IV, from the tacitly held assumption that only through public scrutiny of individual 'testimony' can the sincerity and commitment of a person's Christian life be truly validated – a public scrutiny that is near impossible among farmers but amply possible for fishers. It is to the relationship that such local theories of religion have with their anthropological counterparts that I want to consider next.

Conceptual Themes and Questions

The enterprise of theorising 'religion' – a task that this thesis is also involved in – is not new, with many of the 'founding fathers' of sociology and anthropology giving much attention to observing, recording, classifying and eventually defining the phenomenon we

call 'religion'. The (perhaps immodest) quest of these men was to unearth the origins and latent functions of religion (Pals 1996) as a universal or natural human phenomenon: Marx (1977) told us that religion is alienating false consciousness; Tylor (2010) told us that religion is about belief in supernatural beings; Durkheim (2008) told us that religion is the worship of society by its members; Freud (2001) told us that religion is a kind of neurosis; Weber (1977) told us that religion is socially enacted ideals; and Geertz (1960, 1968, 1973), following Weber, told us that religion is a cultural system.

It is striking that Tylor's definition, now almost a hundred and forty years old, appears to fit best with my particular ethnographic context and my own understanding of what religion is. Some anthropologists (e.g. Asad 1993, 2003; Ruel 2001) have pointed out that a *belief*-centric definition of religion is often, in effect, a *Christian*-centric definition, and my sympathy towards Tylor is undoubtedly related to the fact that I am a Christian studying Christians. Christians, particularly (but by no means exclusively) the evangelical Protestant Christians that are the subject of this research, do indeed invest heavily in 'belief'. Yet, for many such Christians, religion is not 'belief in spiritual beings', but belief in *a* spiritual being – God. Thus, although religion can be said to be 'belief in God', for many evangelicals, 'belief', in its sincere (Keane 1997, 2002) and committed (Howell 2007) form, needs to be defined more closely as 'faith', and, more closely still, 'God' needs to be spoken of in relation to 'Jesus Christ'. This formulation – '*religion is faith in Jesus Christ*' – is clearly Christian-centric and thus runs the risk of seeming 'repugnant' (Harding 1991, 2000). Nevertheless, the resistance to a more general (and thus comparative) category of 'religion' is not of my own making but is taken from expressions of religiosity local to Gamrie. Consider the following extract from a sermon I heard preached (by a man I shall call Sam) while visiting Gamrie's Open Brethren (OB) Hall one evening in June 2008 before I started my fieldwork proper:

We're not really interested tonight in religion, because religion hasn't saved a soul – we're interested in reality! What would you offer God [on the Day of Judgement]? Your sincerity? It's not enough! It's only by faith that you are saved! Your religion? My friend, please don't do that – you still need to be saved... You need to be saved!

Where Sam makes a deliberate effort to subsume ‘sincerity’ and ‘religion’ into what are, for him at least, the much more potent rubrics of ‘faith’ and ‘reality’, what is needed, it seems, is a critical interrogation of this ‘reality’ of which he speaks. As I argued in my MScR², where evangelicals speak broadly about ‘faith’, anthropologists speak, perhaps even more broadly, about the notion of ‘belief’. Yet ‘belief’ is a highly particular (and often Christian) notion (Ruel 2001: 100). Therefore, where the earliest (pre-Christian) usage of the term *pistis*³ simply meant ‘trust’ or ‘confidence’, the use of the word *pisteuo*⁴ in the New Testament acquired a distinctly technical sense – ‘to believe’ came to refer to an almost procedural notion of conversion (ibid.: 102). Crucially, such ‘conversion’ no longer simply referred to the personal trust of *pistis*, but also to trust in an event – that of the resurrection. Belief became an affirmation of both a person and an event. Essentially:

BELIEF = PERSON + EVENT

Or rather:

BELIEF = JESUS + RESURRECTION

As time went on, the Early Church established a body of beliefs which, once codified by the Council of Nicaea, became orthodoxy, any deviation from which was heresy (ibid.: 101). Then along came the Reformation and its heavy emphasis upon the interiority of personal faith (ibid.: 111). Thus, in no time at all, it seems, we have moved from belief as trust in persons, to belief as convictions about events, to belief as corporately held orthodoxy, to belief as the inward experience of faith. We can, therefore, rework our earlier reformulation of Ruel’s definition of belief as:

BELIEF = PERSON + EVENT + ORTHODOXY + INWARD EXPERIENCE

Or rather:

² I want to retain this same =/+ format used in my MScR thesis (Webster 2008) to express the same contextual content on the points that follow on this page and the following two.

³ Gk (noun): *belief*. The word was commonly employed in an economically contractual sense.

⁴ Gk (verb): *to believe*.

BELIEF = JESUS + RESURRECTION + CHURCH + FAITH

The core issue here is the way in which ‘beliefs’ find their mode of expression – that of utterly sincere and committed conviction. Žižek agrees, stating that “‘fundamentalism’ concerns neither belief as such nor its content; what distinguishes a ‘fundamentalist’ is *the way in which he relates to his beliefs...*’ (Žižek 2006: 385; Emphasis added). In essence, “‘fundamentalism’ enacts a short-circuit between the Symbolic and the Real, that is, in it, some symbolic fragment (say, the sacred text, the Bible in the case of Christian fundamentalists) is *itself posited as real* (to be read ‘literally’, not to be played with; in short, exempted from all dialectic of reading)’ (ibid.: 386. Emphasis added). Protestant Fundamentalism, put simply, is, in the most ‘literal’ sense imaginable, *a religious anti-hermeneutic* (Marty and Appleby 1994). Protestant Fundamentalism is that which relates to its beliefs not as a ‘symbolic fragment’ but as a complete and perfect reality. ‘We’re interested in reality!’ the Brethren preacher shouted at me from the front of the hall. The Brethren faith, like that of the Gamrie Kirk and the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster (FPCU), is primarily committed to expressing the reality that they know, in their most sincere ‘heart of hearts’, to be a literally true reality. It is perhaps fitting then, to end here with a final amendment to my earlier reformulation of belief. Thus, it is no longer:

BELIEF = JESUS + RESURRECTION + CHURCH + FAITH

But rather:

REALITY = JESUS + RESURRECTION + CHURCH + FAITH

Where the previous five formulations seem to describe Ruel’s (2001) understanding of the historical development of Christian theology in general, it is this sixth and final formulation that appears to best describe the lived reality of the religion of Gamrie. To the extent, then, that my Christian informants appeared to conflate their understanding of reality as it is experienced ‘out there’ (with a hand gesturing to the entire world) with faith as it is experienced ‘in here’ (with a fist thumping their own heart), it is interesting to note how closely this manoeuvre of theirs mirrors the conflation of ‘practice’ with

‘belief’ so often seen in anthropology. Thus, it is this last reformulation of belief as ‘reality’ that best encapsulates the theoretical and thematic content of my research. But how is this reality experienced by local Christians? And how might that experience be given an anthropological formulation? It is to this last question in particular that I now turn. The initial answer I provide here is only meant to be partial and is given as a way of opening the door to further discussion in the chapters that follow it by covering the four overarching themes that run through the entire thesis, namely; words, immanence, imminence and enchantment. I want to discuss each very briefly in turn.

Words

This theme emerges from the question: how do words work and what are their effects? For the Christians of Gamrie, the religious reality of everyday life is experienced first and foremost through words and language. By ‘words’ then I do not mean simply to refer to the written ‘Word’ of scripture, nor to written words in general, but to all those words that are written and read, spoken and heard, sub-vocalised and thought, that together form language in general and religious language in particular. In this sense I am interested in words as both ideas and objects. Where the ideational content of language within the Protestant context is well rehearsed (especially in terms of the theological content of ‘belief’ (Keller 2005, 2006; Robbins 2003, 2006)), what seems somehow less obvious is the material properties of words and language. I draw here upon the work of Coleman (2000) and Keane (2002, 2004, 2006) to show how words work insofar as they are not only unavoidably implicated in material *processes* but themselves have material *properties* and thus achieve real effects.

Immanence

This theme emerges from the question: how are spiritual realities brought near and with what effects? Where Gamrie’s Christians understand and experience the world as controlled by a wider spiritual battle between God and the Devil, my aim here is not only to problematise the assumption that Christianity in general and Protestantism in particular is a religion of transcendence marked by a ‘radical discontinuity’ (Cannell 2006) between

spirit and flesh, but to further suggest that immanence and transcendence co-constitute each other through the everyday interaction of words, bodies and material objects. In speaking both of the ‘immanence of transcendence’ and the ‘transcendence of immanence’ this theme deploys familiar Christian notions of the here and the hereafter but in the less familiar contexts of everyday objects (such as domestic appliances) and political eschatology (seen through the European Union and the state of Israel). My aim here is unashamedly an anthropological cliché; to render the mundane things of the everyday as exotic (my washing machine is God’s near presence) and the exotic things of the cosmos as mundane (the Kingdom of Satan is the Common Fisheries Policy).

Imminence

This theme emerges from the question: how are spiritual realities experienced as soon to occur and with what effects? Where the Christians of Gamrie were divided over all sorts of theological and ecclesiastical issues, the one thing that seemed to unite the six places of worship in the village was a deeply held attachment to the eschatological certainty that we were living in ‘the last of the last days’. My aim here is to show how the present, when set against the distant (eternal) future, far from abolishing the near future (Guyer 2007), is actually reliant on this temporal middle ground as the very site where the eschaton is actively waited upon. In showing how the imminence of the eschaton shaped not only the search for ‘signs of the times’, but also fed into inter-generational evangelism, the public preaching of the gospel, personal acts of witness, the frequency of demonic attack and the success or failure of the Scottish fishing industry, this theme grapples with anthropological understandings of not only time, but also of materiality, politics and language.

Enchantment

This theme emerges from the question: how does the religion of Gamrie enchant the world and how does this enchanted Christian world view relate to the disenchantment of Gamrie’s non-Christian ‘others’? I use the term enchantment to describe the process whereby the world is ‘made alive with a kind of magic’. Drawing on Weber’s (1977,

1978a, 1978b, 1978c) notion of disenchantment as a loss of plasticity as well as Gell's (1992) work on magical efficacy, I suggest that the 'magic' of enchantment is seen in its conflation of sign and referent. In this sense, I argue that preachers become the voice of God, the Bible is literally alive and fishermen catch not only prawns but also the souls of men. The role accorded here to materiality is central. The referent, that is, the 'Real' object, is accorded the kind of agency normally only attributed to human actors. While this is nothing new in the Christian tradition (aprons, holy water and the incorruptible remains of the Saints have been healing people for centuries) my contribution here is to show how the Protestant tradition is no less implicated in enchanted materiality (see Coleman 2000) than the Catholic or Orthodox traditions. Where the (Reformed) theological literature might cry 'idolatry' (Calvin 2007) the (modernist) sociological literature has tended to cry 'fetish' (Marx 1971). My own position seeks to avoid both of these judgements by looking at the lived experience of enchantment as a real relationship to the 'Real' established in and through the deployment of words, bodies and other objects.

*Literature: Ethnographies of Christianity*⁵

Within the anthropology of religion, the absence of a strong and vibrant anthropology of Christianity has gone largely unnoticed until relatively recently. Apart from a few early exceptions (Bond et al. 1979, James and Johnson 1988, Saunders 1988), conventional anthropological wisdom had been to view Christianity as a religion that was both uninteresting and threatening. In terms of being uninteresting, Robbins (2003, 2006) and Cannell (2006, 2005) both suggest that anthropology decided some years ago that it knew what Christianity was about and needed to delve no deeper. Christianity was the Christianity of Weber's Calvinists (Weber 1977) – ascetic, dogmatic, individualistic, and driven by the interiority of cognitive belief and the exteriority of wealth accumulation. Indeed, Christianity was as dull as Augustine was joyless (Sahlins 1996). If familiarity breeds contempt, the development of an anthropology of Christianity was always going to struggle, and just as much for cultural reasons as theoretical ones (Robbins 2003). Christianity, and particularly Evangelical Protestantism, had been dubbed 'the repugnant

⁵ This literature review has been revised and updated from my MScR thesis (Webster 2008).

cultural other' (Harding 1991). Thus, in terms of being threatening, Christianity was perceived to be deeply unsettling to the project of liberal secularism with which anthropology was often associated.

Further explanations for this hostility towards Christianity can be unearthed by looking at the history of anthropology. Anthropology was born, not only out of the 'monster' of political and economic imperialism (Asad 2003), but also out of its more spiritually minded sister institution, the Church and her (sometimes no less 'monstrous') heralds, the missionaries. The desire to sever these colonial links was due not only to a political guilt complex, but also to the fact that much anthropology desired to define itself as a 'science' that was utterly unlike the quintessentially metaphysical pursuits of theology. In this sense, anthropology ignored Christianity, in order to ignore theology, in order to ignore metaphysics, in order to define itself as a science (Webster 2008). Because anthropology and theology were held to offer mutually exclusive accounts of humanity, anthropology distanced itself from Christianity because its theology existed, in Douglas's terms (1966), as an 'anomalous' and, therefore, 'dangerous' mix of familiarity and difference (Robbins 2003).

To cement this achievement of creating distance, anthropology, as I have already argued above, also sought to define Christianity as an 'impossible religion' - that is, as purely 'a religion of transcendence' (Cannell 2006: 43). Where anthropology tends to privilege the study of what people do rather than merely what they think about (Robbins 2006), and where Christians were seen as not really *doing* anything (or at least not really doing anything particularly 'exotic'), Christianity was affirmed as a religion that was tediously consumed with belief and doctrine, and as lacking the excitement of the 'weird' and 'wonderful' rituals of the more 'primitive religions' (Lowie 1936) so typified by Malinowski's 'savages' (1926, 1927).

While much has changed, the anthropology of Christianity is still too often narrowly focused on 'belief' (Howell 2007), with much of what is now central to the anthropology of 'non-Christian' religions still remaining peripheral – to give but a few examples, the question of the self as 'modern subject' (Keane 2002), embodiment, ritual practice, 'folk-

theology' (Coleman 2006), and most recently, emotion (Riis and Woodhead 2010). Christian metaphysics continues to haunt anthropology (Keane 2006), with many ethnographers refusing to recognise that 'Christianity has functioned in a range of ways as anthropology's theoretical repressed' (Cannell 2005: 341). What is needed, it seems, is an enquiry into anthropology's own 'theological prehistory' (ibid.), and a concerted effort to re-evaluate the place of Christian theology within ethnographic accounts.

The anthropology of Christianity, over the last ten or fifteen years has been striving to establish a comparative study of the multivariate forms of Christianity found across the globe. Some key authors here are Cannell (2006), writing on Filipino Catholics and now American Latter Day Saints (LDS), Coleman (2000), researching charismatics in Sweden, Howell (2007, 2008), examining cultural expressions of Christian 'commitment' among Southern Baptists in the Philippines, Engelke (2007), whose research in Zimbabwe concerns the role of textual authority in Christianity, Mayblin (2010) writing on gender and morality among Brazilian Catholic peasants, Scott (2005), researching Christian mission on the Solomon Islands, Faubion (2001, 2011) who has written on millennialism within the Branch Davidian movement, Meyer (1999) who writes on evangelical Presbyterians in Ghana, Tomlinson (2006, 2004) who researches Methodism in Fiji, Keller (2005, 2006), examining Seventh Day Adventists in Madagascar, Keane (1995, 1997, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008), who has produced research on Sumbanese Protestants in Indonesia, Guyer (2007), researching American evangelical understandings of the 'near future', and Bielo (2007), researching born-again personhood in America.

As well as these key ethnographic monographs and articles there have also been several edited volumes and special issues in journals that examine issues relating to the anthropology of Christianity. The three early works already mentioned as being published before the sub-field proliferated are: *African Christianity: Patterns of religious Continuity* (Bond et al., 1979), *Culture and Christianity: The Dialectics of Transformation* (Saunders 1988) and *Vernacular Christianity* (James and Johnson 1988), which examine various forms of Christianity from Jamaica to Korea to the Ivory Coast to Greece and America. These have led some (notably Hann 2007) to suggest that the extent to which anthropology has ignored Christianity has been overstated and that it can be

better said to have ignored Orthodox Christianity, particularly in Eastern Europe. Hann and Goltz (2010) attempt to fill this gap with the edited volume *Eastern Christians* which gives attention to various religious practices (such as iconography, hymnology and monastic life) heretofore under-theorised in the literature.

Yet the more traditionally Protestant concern with the doctrine of *sola scriptura* has continued to produce anthropological reflections on the place of the Bible within Christian communities. Particularly important here is James Bielo's (2009) edited collection *The Social Life of Scriptures: Cross Cultural Perspectives on Biblicism*, in which he examines the relationship between 'biblical texts and communities of practice' (ibid.: 2). With the publication of Anderson et al. (2010) *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods* comes the bringing together of various anthropological, sociological, historical and theological perspectives on gender, conversion, globalisation and power. Finally, as well as Engelke and Tomlinson's (2006) *The Limits of Meaning* (discussed below), there have been two significant special editions of journals that relate closely to those working within the anthropology of Christianity. Firstly, Meltzer and Elsner (2009) edited a special issue on saints for *Critical Enquiry*, most notably including a piece by Coleman (2009) on the possibility of charismatic Protestant sainthood. Secondly and more recently, Robbins and Engelke (2010) edited a special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* entitled *Global Christianity, Global Critique* with the aim of bringing the anthropology of Christianity into conversation with theologians and philosophers recently writing on Paul. At the heart of this issue is an attempt to encourage 'critical thinkers not just to think *about* religion but also in important respects to think *with* it' (ibid.: 625) – an aim that this research strongly shares, as I discuss in my analysis of 'methodology' and 'ethics'.

It is clearly impossible to examine in detail all the above works. What follows simply identifies three broad themes (Webster 2008) that can be drawn out from the literature: (i) critiques of meaning, (ii) the materiality of religion, and (iii) the interpretation of religious experience.

Critiques of meaning within the anthropology of Christianity are ethnographically relevant for Gamrie, because, like Tomlinson's (2006) Fijian Methodists, Gamrie's Christians are forever striving to delimit what is and is not meaningful, in prayer, in sermonising, and in their daily spiritual witness. The materiality of religion within the anthropology of Christianity is ethnographically important for Gamrie, because, as with Cannell's (2005, 2006) Mormons, Gamrie's Christians are constantly engaged in managing the tense relationship that exists between the 'spirit' and the 'flesh'. Frameworks for interpreting the religious lives of Christians within the anthropology of Christianity are ethnographically significant for Gamrie, because, like Keller's (2004, 2005) Adventists, 'approaching' Gamrie's Christians requires taking seriously the reality of their religious experiences *as they themselves describe them*, especially where those descriptions sit rather awkwardly with my own somewhat different (albeit Christian) worldview.

The first theme is an attempt to critique established anthropological concepts of meaning. Perhaps the best writing on this theme has been produced by Engelke (2007) and Tomlinson (2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2006). Tomlinson's work on the role of meaning and meaninglessness in prayer and sermonising is directly relevant to what follows in this thesis. His perspective, clearly influenced by Asad's (1993, 2003) critique of Geertz (1973), seeks to explore several pertinent questions: how do Christian rituals accomplish 'meaning'? What happens when meaning fails? When ethnographers see their task as defined by the quest for meaning, is it by virtue of engaging in that quest that they create the possibility of productive meaninglessness (Engelke and Tomlinson 2006)?

The second theme that unites much of the ethnographic literature on Christianity is an attempt to pay serious regard to the materiality of religion, rather than just focus upon transcendence. The key authors here are Coleman (2000, 2006, 2010), Cannell (2005, 2006), and Keane (2006, 2008). Discussions about Christianity often start, and, perhaps even more often, end, with efforts to define Christianity (Webster 2008). Cannell's (2005, 2006) work is no exception. One definitional approach she offers is made by suggesting that Christianity can be understood with reference to its tortured relationship with the material world, that is, with the realm of the flesh, as summed up in

Christianity's 'problem of transcendence' (Cannell 2006). Christianity, she argues, has been too easily written off as interested only in the 'spirit', and not at all interested in the world of 'things'. Yet Cannell (2006) argues that it is local representations of the tensions between the transcendent ('spirit') and the material ('flesh') that are ethnographically revealing. My own argument takes a slightly different tack by emphasising not tension so much as compatibility – and even conflation – by asking how transcendence might be a kind of immanence and vice versa.

The efficacy of this argument can already be seen clearly among members of the Word of Life⁶, a church whose main concerns – bodily healing and material plenty – represent what Coleman (2000) calls a folk-theology of prosperity, where 'faith' comes to be deployed in an explicitly material way. As if attempting to make my argument for me, Coleman's informants described themselves as 'spiritual bodybuilders' (2006: 171), not as souls trapped in a cage of flesh. My assertion in Chapter III that the preaching of 'The Word' can be viewed as a kind of sacrificial meal finds resonance, then, with Coleman's informants who also talked of the experience of reading their Bibles as if they were actually eating 'The Word' (ibid.: 182). It is within this sense of materiality – not only found in objects, but also in words – which my research is directed towards. Yet for many Christians, (and surely for many anthropologists), material things remain problematic because they cannot speak for themselves – 'the inability of objects to determine their interpretation leads people into false beliefs' (Keane 2006: 312). Furthermore, all that we can say about objects is also true of words: words and objects *objectify identity* – they are social and relational (Webster 2008). It is coming to terms, then, with the precise nature of the sociality (and 'spirituality') of words, material objects and signs, that is the key challenge of this thesis.

The third theme that unites many ethnographies of Christianity is a debate about how best to 'understand' or 'interpret' the religious experiences of others. Keller (2005, 2006) and Bielo (2007) both appear to be asking questions about how to come to terms with a culture, a religious ritual, a church's doctrine, or an informant's lived reality – questions that are particularly poignant at a time when the notion of 'meaning' appears less

⁶ A Protestant charismatic church in Sweden.

anthropologically redemptive than before (Engelke and Tomlinson 2006). Will efforts to appreciate another's 'meanings' necessarily be reductionist? Is understanding not inseparable from criticism, and if so (how) can we 'understand' without engaging in ethnocentric value judgements? Some initial answers to these questions may be found by temporarily stepping away from the ethnographic literature and towards philosophy. Taylor's (1985) notion of the problem of the 'incorrigibility thesis'⁷ and his recommendation of a 'language of perspicuous contrast'⁸ is striking in so far as it appears to be grappling with the 'problem of interpretation' that arises out of a critique of meaning, but does so twenty years before the anthropological literature approached such issues. I will say more about this in my comments on ethics, but I want to end here by focusing back upon the anthropological literature. More recently, then, Bielo (2007) asks himself how he can understand Jay, a key informant of his, who states in a public address that his salvation is the secret to his financial success. For Bielo:

As an anthropologist, my goal is to question what cultural logic might be at work in this relationship between faith and finances. *How do I understand Jay's testimony...instead of mocking it? Why does his testimony make perfect sense to his listeners?* (ibid.:317. Emphasis added)

What follows in this thesis has been written with that same goal of understanding. Of paramount importance here is the act of 'approaching people' (Keller 2006), that is, the act (in 'initial' observation and 'final' writing) of taking seriously, not only the reality of the religious experience of the Christian, but also the content of their religious claims.

Research Summary: Belief, Experience and Materiality

Thus, this thesis will examine the relationship between belief and experience. My concern is to describe and explain the folk theology of the Christians of Gamrie and in so doing, to analyse the relationship between the intellectual content of their religious beliefs and their actual experience of everyday life. The key concept I use to bridge the realms of belief and experience is enchantment. By focusing upon enchantment – and by

⁷ Where all criticism is viewed as ethnocentric, thereby suffocating analysis.

⁸ An analytical dialogue of mutual give-and-take.

comparing and contrasting it to disenchantment – I take my cue from Weber insofar as I emphasise the central importance of ideas in shaping material experiences. Yet where Weber was concerned primarily with soteriology (and specifically with the Calvinist theology of salvation through predestination) my interest in the role of ideas is more general. In addition to examining different forms of soteriology in Chapters III, IV and V, I also examine folk understandings of divine presence and demonology in Chapter VI, eschatology in Chapter VII, and local articulations of the doctrine of scripture throughout the entire thesis. Further, where Weber's intent was sociological, insofar as he sought to show how predestination had impacted upon the society and economy of much of Western Europe, my intent, being anthropological, takes a somewhat smaller scale. For much of the thesis I intentionally limit my scope to the local; to Gamrie and its immediate coastal vicinity. At other times my focus is broader, being inclusive of wider social and economic processes occurring within northeast Scotland and across the nation as a whole. I also attempt to forge more comparative links with relevant ethnographies of Christianity and with different socio-economic trends developing across the north Atlantic.

Despite these occasional forays into the 'bigger picture' my interest remains firmly focused upon local folk theology, that is, upon the religious beliefs of the Christians of Gamrie and the ways in which these beliefs create and are created by the world in which they live. Importantly, this concern with the ways in which beliefs are created by the worlds in which they occur draws my focus away from my (otherwise strong) commitment to analysing the enchanting power of ideas and towards more materialist concerns. This too can be found in Weber, who, after all, was not just interested in the Protestant *ethic* but also in the development of *capitalism*. Here, then, the object under the anthropological lens is not theology but fishing. By looking at local experiences of the enchantment of labour – of trawling for prawns in the North Sea – I am, at the same time, looking again to the 'bigger picture', that is, to issues of modernity and modern personhood. Thus, by giving attention to the catching and sale of prawns, I seek to show how the conceptual world of ideas (providence, testimony, witness) is unavoidably implicated in the materiality of objects (boats, nets, diesel, money).

Importantly, the role of materiality (and its relationship to theology) is not limited in the thesis to fishing for prawns. Words too are regarded as enchanting objects (Keane 2002, 2004, 2006), not only through language, but also through the body (Coleman 2000). Words, then, and their relationship to language and the body, act to bridge my treatment of theology and fishing. Such an approach has the advantage of providing both ethnographic and theoretical insights insofar as words and ‘the Word’ are of interest to both the contemporary anthropology of Christianity (Cannell 1999, 2006, Coleman 2006, 2010, Hann and Goltz 2010) and the Christians of Gamrie. It seems, then, that rather than viewing anthropology as an act of ‘cultural translation’ (Geertz 1973), it may be of more help to see it as an effort towards forming what Charles Taylor aptly called ‘a language of perspicuous contrast’ (1985:125), that is, ‘a language in which we could formulate both *their* way of life and *ours* as alternative possibilities in relation to some human constants at work in both’ (ibid. Emphasis added). Where providing such a ‘perspicuous contrast’ is a key aim of this thesis, the subject (and object) of this contrast – of this ‘human constant at work in both’ – is language itself, that is, the shared concern for the importance of words, and, in the ethnographic context of northeast Scotland, their enchanting relationship to Protestants and prawns.

‘Being There’: Methods and Ethics

Insofar as the ‘being there’ of ethnographic fieldwork requires the ‘participant observer’ to be both an instrument and object of study (in the sense that fieldworkers are unavoidably implicated in their fields, intervening in them, hopefully with some degree of ‘reflexivity’), I have chosen to take my discussion of methods and ethics together. I have done so in an attempt to achieve a greater degree of transparency with regards to both how I did the fieldwork and who I said I was while doing it.

Initial access and moving in

During an early meeting about my Masters dissertation on the anthropology of Christianity in Scotland, my second supervisor and regional specialist Michael Rosie turned to me and asked ‘Have you ever been to Gardenstown?’ Having admitted not only

to never having been there, but also to not knowing of its existence, Michael simply suggested ‘You should go – there’s an awful lot of religion going on in a very small place’. My interest piqued, I paid the village a visit when next visiting family in the area. Having counted three churches in as many minutes as we drove to the bottom of the brae, I quickly decided that this would indeed be a good place to study conservative Protestantism in Scotland. Discovering another smaller church as we walked around the Seatown confirmed this decision, and I began to visit the village on weekends to attend Sunday services. It was the atmosphere of those early services that made such a strong impression on me. The slow doleful notes of the electric organ, the elderly ladies in their head coverings, the posters and wall hangings declaring man’s perilous spiritual condition outside of Christ, the long prayers and the even longer sermons that communicated this same message of damnation and salvation, but with an emotional intensity I had more readily attributed to American televangelists. It all seemed so foreign and exotic – and less than thirty miles from my own family home.

By my third or fourth visit to Gamrie I was clear in my mind that this was where I wanted to conduct my ethnography, so I set about getting access the only way I knew how – by writing letters to the churches. Here is an example of what I wrote, in this instance to one of the Brethren fellowships in the village:

Dear Brothers,

I am... planning my fieldwork research into the Anthropology of Christianity in the northeast of Scotland... with a special focus on the various Christian communities of Gardenstown. By looking at the different churches in Gardenstown, I hope to gain some insights into how the daily life of the Christian is experienced in Scotland today.

I should also say that I am a committed Christian, having been blessed with Christian parents who brought me up to be a believer. I have for a number of years been a member of St Columba’s Free Church of Scotland in Edinburgh. My choice of research into Christianity in Scotland comes out of something of a personal spiritual interest. Because the PhD will be an extended piece of work, I

want to be able to reflect upon my own faith during the research process, rather than self consciously exclude it from my studies. I wish to show that the whole lived experience of the Christian is not a matter of arbitrary moralistic lifestyle choices but a matter of deliberate engagement with a personal faith in Jesus Christ; [...] the study would seek to listen rather than to assume, it would attempt to understand rather than to argue, it would seek to empathise rather than to judge.

If the study is to proceed, it requires the cooperation and good will of those whose lives I will seek to study. [...] Ideally I would hope to live in Gardenstown for an extended period of time (anything up to 18 months), and become over this period a part of the different Christian communities in the town. I would undertake to accomplish my work in a non-intrusive, respectful and confidential manner. [...] I hope... you and others at the Hall would be willing to participate. I am deeply aware that responding to my request will involve expenditure of time and effort on the part of those who participate.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Joseph Webster

Having written to all six churches in the village, I quickly received positive responses from both the Gamrie Kirk and the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster (FPCU), both of whom were happy for me to conduct the research. After a longer period of time I also heard back from one of the leaders at the Open Brethren (OB) who said he and others at the fellowship would be willing to participate. I never heard back from any of the three Closed Brethren fellowships (Braehead, Seatown and High Street) and assumed that establishing access to them would be very difficult. Despite this setback I proceeded to communicate with the Kirk, the FPCU and the OB, requesting accommodation with a household within one of their congregations. I very quickly received an offer to lodge in a spare room of a local school teacher in the village – a divorced woman in her fifties who was a committed member of the local Kirk, but whose children and grandchildren did not

live in the village. Once the details were arranged, there was nothing left to do but move into the village and begin the fieldwork proper, which I did on September 10th 2008.

Filling my days

Having moved into the village, I quickly fell into a routine based around the rhythm of writing, going for walks and going to church. A typical day would start around 8am. I would walk through the village to buy a morning paper and meet several others doing the same and pass the time of day chatting (in this way buying a paper could take anywhere between 15 minutes and an hour depending on who I met). I would come home and spend the remainder of the morning writing up notes from the previous evening's service and then take a walk down to the harbour where I would invariably meet some of the church elders who tended to take their walks together. In the afternoon I would visit elderly Christians in the village for a 'fly cup' where we would drink tea, talk about church events and current affairs, or sometimes read the Bible and pray. Evenings were the busiest and most structured part of any day where I would be out at a service or meeting almost every night. By week two of the fieldwork I had established where each place of worship was and when all their various meetings were and had drawn up a rough timetable to make sure that I circulated around them fairly consistently so as not to favour one place and neglect others – something that became important as time went on and informants became more possessive of my time and attendance at *their* place of worship.

Unsurprisingly, much of my time was spent attending public worship and other church organised events. I would attend these meetings anywhere between seven and ten times a week, roughly four of which would be on a Sunday. As well as the main Sunday services (morning and evening) I would attend breaking of bread services, home Bible studies, church Bible studies, Bible readings, ministry meetings, prophecy meetings, Sunday and midweek prayer meetings, church rallies and conventions, missionary meetings, singing nights, gospel outreach meetings and church socials as well as more informal men's breakfasts, coffee mornings, 'soup and sweet' fundraisers, church after-school clubs, church youth clubs for teenagers and men's get-togethers for the retired.

As well as these explicitly ‘church based’ field sites I also worked across a range of other spaces. A month after arriving in Gamrie I attended a memorial service in Fraserburgh for several fishermen who had been lost in an onboard fire. The service was run by the Fishermen’s Mission, and after asking around, it became clear that volunteering at ‘the Mission’ would be a good way to meet people, particularly since I was interested in knowing more about the connections between Christianity and the fishing. Within a few weeks I had managed to set up a ‘placement’ at the Mission where I would shadow the ‘Mission Man’ and generally help out around the centre. It was here that I met many folk with Gamrie connections who had left the village to find work. My work at the Mission turned out to be a very fruitful site, allowing me to collect many different people’s ‘testimonies’⁹ which they were, by and large, keen to have me hear. I also volunteered at a drop in centre for Filipino fishermen run by local Christian skippers. Importantly, my time at the Mission helped open up two additional field sites – the fish market, and latterly, the boats themselves. On several occasions I went down to the early morning markets in Fraserburgh to chat to the fishermen, merchants and auctioneers and photograph the various goings on, usually accompanied by the ‘Mission Mannie’ which made my presence easily explicable.

A few months before I left the village, for a week in September and a week in October 2009, I finally got the chance to work on the trawlers. Both skippers were Gamrie Christians (as were some of the crew) and both boats structured their entire working week around not going to sea on a Sunday. These two separate week long trips provided very rich and interesting data on many of the themes of the research, helped by the socio-spiritual dynamic onboard, with discussions about binge drinking and coprophilia broken up with hymn singing, sharing testimony and debates about creationism and evolution.

Other field sites included the Gamrie harbour and summer café, Bob’s Shoppie, Murray’s Bakery and various key informants houses. The Macduff harbour café also proved to be a good place to meet people, as did the Fraserburgh harbour. I could enter all of these places sure in the knowledge that sooner or later someone I knew would turn up for a

⁹ The personal biographical story of becoming a ‘born-again’ Christian.

chat. Much of my most interesting data was gained through these ‘chance encounters’ where people would stop to swap stories and ‘muse awa’.

Within a relatively short space of time I had met and was on friendly terms with several of the leading men at the three different Closed Brethren fellowships and had started attending their services as well as those of the Kirk, FPCU and OB. With access to all six churches established, I began to consolidate these relationships while also forming new ones with Christians from other nearby towns and villages, not only from Fraserburgh, but also in Macduff (a small fishing port, but with a large shipyard owned by a Gamrie Kirk elder) and Banff (home to one of the few successful charismatic churches in the area). I also had contacts in Sandend and Findochty (where I knew some Brethren and Cooneyite Christians) to the west and Peterhead and Boddam around the coast to the east (home to many independent evangelical churches).

The months seemed to pass slowly – I gradually filled a shoe box with little note books covered in worn brown parcel paper, each with the title ‘Sermons...’ and then a number. I was on ‘Sermons 39’ with a week of fieldwork left. Each contained about 10,000 words of fieldnotes from church meetings and the ‘daily round’. This routine of walking, chatting, drinking tea and worshipping changed very little throughout the 15 months of fieldwork. Some of the more informal midweek meetings closed down over the summer as the evenings got longer and lighter and the men spent more time out in their creel boats fishing for lobsters. While this did give some sense of a seasonal round to the spiritual life of Gamrics, things continued, by and large, unchanged. At various points it became clear to me that my weekly routine had slipped rather seamlessly into that of a retired man. Getting the morning paper, going for walks round the harbour, collecting tiny sea shells along the tide line of the beach, popping into folk’s houses for a fly cup, going to the bakery at lunch time all became big events and rather second nature to me.

Intriguingly, despite the fact that I was about 50 years too young to be adopting such a lifestyle, nobody seemed to find it particularly odd, or if they did, they were far too polite and shy to say. One of my few regrets was not having a dog to walk; it would have made being out and about in the village even easier – although not many of the older men kept

dogs and did not seem to need one as an excuse to go for a wander. Perhaps the one thing that marked me out as a young person was my mode of transport – a jet black Vespa ET4 with full chrome tubing front, back and sides. Interestingly, this seemed to cause much more amusement than did spending most of my time with the elderly; a church goer riding a Vespa seemed to be more odd to my informants than a Vespa-riding Church goer, that is to say, it was the Vespa and not my ‘old mannie’ lifestyle that seemed to be the odd one out, especially given my own identity as a committed Christian. It is to this identity that I now want to turn to.

‘So are you a Christian?’: The ethics of self-identification

One of the last pieces of advice I received from one of my supervisors was ‘Treat your fieldwork like a romance – you have to fall in love with them and you have to make them fall in love with you’. I left for the field knowing that the former was almost certainly going to be easier than the latter. In a sense I was already in love with the village with its little harbour and creel boats; the cliffs and seashore; the tiny Brethren Halls tucked away in amongst the old fishing cottages; the bakery that advertised Brooke Bond tea as if it were still 1950; the elderly men in twos and threes, walking bent over along the coastal path – it all seemed rather straightforwardly romantic. What I knew would be more challenging would be gaining the trust of Gamrie’s Christians, who had a reputation for being shy and private people in the main, made more so by the religiously separatist strictures of much of their Brethren heritage. The solution, as far as I saw it, was two-fold: telling people I was a Christian and acting like other local Christians did.

First, then, I had to make it clear that I was a committed Christian by telling people so. ‘So are you a Christian?’ was the question that very often came when speaking to people in the village about my work (in a similar vein to the questioning of colleagues in anthropology who often seemed to require a personal biographical explanation for my own choice of research topic). Having pre-empted the question, I attempted to spell out the answer in my earliest communication with Gamrie’s key religious gatekeepers. It will be remembered that in my first letter I explained:

I am a committed Christian, having been blessed with Christian parents who brought me up to be a believer. I have for a number of years been a member of St Columba's Free Church of Scotland in Edinburgh.

This (written and spoken) claim to being a committed Christian, while clearly key to gaining access, was not straightforward or unambiguous, either to myself or my informants. Seemingly endless doctrinal and denominational divisions exist among conservative Protestants, producing just as many different shades of religious self-identity. Such variation inevitably caused (not uninteresting) confusion among my Christian informants, some of whom saw me as 'soundly saved' and 'a Brother in the Lord' and asked me to take full part in their religious lives. Some of them even asked me to preach to them (a request that I carefully declined each time it was raised for fear of souring relations with the other churches with whom they had bad relations). Others saw me as a Christian, but were unconvinced by my commitment. 'Are you *born-again*?'; 'When was it exactly that you were saved?'; 'But do you really believe what *we* believe?'

My identity as a member of the Free Church of Scotland – a conservative Presbyterian denomination in the Calvinist tradition – was both a help and a hindrance. With no Free Church near the village, local Christians did not find it particularly odd that I was attending other churches. Yet attending six churches at once left me in an ecclesiastical no man's land – free to cross the boundaries (particularly of dress code and Bible version) that existed between them all, but not fully involved in any one fellowship. Such vagaries occasionally caused conflict and embarrassment – experiences that were unpleasant at the time but later turned out to be ethnographically insightful. For example, without realising it at the time I created something of a stir in the local OB fellowship by attending Breaking of Bread meetings and actually receiving the bread and wine. One of the leading men supported my doing so, while another was strongly against it because I had not been baptised into their fellowship as an adult member. Others were unsure what to think. Things came to a head at the start of a Breaking of Bread service in February when one of the leading men asked me in private not to participate, saying that the sacrament was for baptised members only, further requesting that I did not tell anyone

that he had made such a request. In the end, I did as he asked, neither partaking in the elements nor explaining my not doing so in relation to his request.

This and other encounters like it, such as Alexander's tacit questioning of my Christian commitment described in Chapter IV, show that while I did speak about myself as a Christian, such words left some in the village unconvinced as to my salvation. What mattered more, then, was conforming to a certain kind of Christian lifestyle by taking several very specific steps to ensure my public conduct closely matched local expectations about what it meant to be a Christian. Most obviously, I was completely teetotal when in Gamrie. Despite living less than ten yards from the only pub in the village (the house I lived in was next door to the hotel), I still, to this day, do not know what the inside of that building looks like – such was the strength of feeling against alcohol, and to drinking in public in particular. While this closed some doors (most notably the door to the pub and its ethnographic insights) it kept other doors open, namely the churches and the houses of those who attended them. Thus, just as someone conducting research within a women's refuge might find it difficult to maintain their access if they were to be regularly seen taking their leisure time in local strip clubs, I decided that frequenting Gamrie's pub would have required me to sacrifice a great deal of my access to Gamrie's Christians. More than this, it was also made clear to me that my 'Christian testimony' would be called into question (*'spoiled'* locally) if I was seen to associate too closely with certain people known to be alcoholics or drug users, as well as those involved in Gamrie's biker scene. Wherever possible, I did speak to these 'transgressive' groups, but always whilst bearing in mind the potential cost to other (more primary) research relationships.

In treating my fieldwork as a romance, then, I sought to 'court' the village – and especially its Christian residents – through a mixture of soft speaking and kind action. I always made sure to take an interest in the content of sermons, asking theological questions to communicate an interest in what was being said; I prayed aloud in prayer meetings (where permitted to do so according to denomination) to index the 'realness' of my own 'personal' faith; I volunteered at local youth clubs and gave my 'testimony' to

the teenagers present when asked to do so by other leaders; I never drank or smoked or used foul language; and of course, I went to church more than anyone else in the village.

Over time, the results were striking, with local people (Christian and ‘non’) seeming to adopt me, almost universally, as ‘an affa good lad’. Most of those I came into contact with in the village initially assumed I was living in Gamrie because I was training to be a Christian minister – and no matter how many times I assured people that this was not the case (explaining that I was a trainee anthropologist not a trainee minister) this locally intelligible identity simply stuck. For those in the village who knew me best and understood I was doing research for a PhD at a ‘secular’ university, many continued to stubbornly assert that I would eventually quit anthropology and become a minister. One friend from Fraserburgh actually ‘prophesied’ over me, saying that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that being a minister was my spiritual destiny.

Being the first person ever to have regularly worshipped at and befriended all the different Christian fellowships in Gamrie, several of my informants told me that they believed God had brought me to the village to unite the six churches as a precursor to revival. ‘You are doing God’s work’, I was told on many occasions; ‘you probably can’t see it, but you *are*’ was their earnest assessment. When it finally came time to leave the village, the Kirk held a surprise goodbye party in my honour, inviting all the various denominations to attend. While it was said to be a remarkable ecumenical triumph that some members from one of Gamrie’s (usually strictly separatist) CB fellowships attended, people also commented on some notably absent figures. Some of the key leading men stood to say a few words in my honour, again voicing the belief that I had done much to unite the Christians of the village. We sang a parting hymn and several of those present (myself included) began to tear up. And with the hugs, handshaking and best wishes over, it was time to go home.

The assessment that I was ‘doing God’s work’ was not just made with regards to the local village context but was also said to apply much more widely. My informants often sought to remind me that what I wrote in my thesis could, from their perspective, have a profound spiritual impact upon those who read it, that is, it could cure their ‘spiritual

blindness’ and ‘bring them to saving faith’. To this end, people would pray in church meetings not only for me, but also for my thesis – that it would bring glory to God and expand his Kingdom. It became clear to me, then, that the longer I lived in the village and the closer I became to the Christians of Gamrie, the more extensively both my physical presence and academic work was appropriated back into the enchanted Christian cosmos of local believers. As far as my informants were concerned, God’s bringing me to the village and his sending me out again was an act of ‘providence’ (see Chapter VI) that united their local ‘witness’ and spread their global ‘message’.

‘What are you going to write about?’: The ethics of representation

As I write this introduction, I am acutely aware that with such sincere friendship – backed by deeply felt religious emotion and expectation – comes with it a felt obligation to write a certain kind of story, namely, a story that does not simply speak *about* the lived experience of the Christians of Gamrie, but *for* that experience. But it is commonly held within the social sciences that being an anthropologist and being an apologist are very different (even mutually exclusive) tasks. This is, by and large, a view that I share, and, as a result, I do not see it as my job, as described in Chapter III, to ‘preach the gospel’ or ‘teach the Bible’, regardless of my ‘committed subject position’ (Howell 2007) as a Christian anthropologist studying Christians. Nor, however, do I seek, as I described in my first letter to the churches in Gamrie, to ‘self consciously exclude it from my studies’. Indeed, my (most basic) aim remains to ‘show that the whole lived experience of the Christian is not a matter of arbitrary moralistic lifestyle choices but a matter of deliberate engagement with a personal faith in Jesus Christ’. Where I then spoke (in local terms) of examining ‘personal faith in Jesus Christ’, I remain committed to the substance of this enquiry, but seek to undertake it through the sociological and anthropological lens of ‘society’, that is, through the expressions of the community, in preaching, testifying, fishing and watching for signs of providence, attack and the end times.

As a result, some of what I will say in the chapters that follow may appear to some as ‘too theological’, that is, in treating the content of sermons or eschatological speculations as just as important as their cultural form, it may at times appear that I am more interested

in the ‘how’ question than the ‘why’ question. In a seminar, when trying to explain *why* a woman named Elsa was weeping to the point of speechlessness in a public prayer meeting when praying for the salvation of the souls of her grandchildren, my answer was, and remains, because she sincerely believed that God would send her grandchildren to eternal punishment in hell unless they repented and became born-again Christians.

Whether we talk of ‘folk theology’ (Coleman 2000), ‘ethno-theology’ (Scott 2005), ‘collective representations’ (Durkheim 2008) or ‘belief’ (Needham 1973) seems to matter little when attempting to grapple with the issue about how to deal with (that is, interpret) behaviours that we choose to define as religious. What matters more is providing an explanation that takes seriously the relationship between (a) indigenous cosmology (my grandchildren are going to hell unless they respond to the gospel) and (b) human action (public weeping). This is not to suggest in any simple way that (a) always provides a straightforward causal explanation for (b), just that the content of (a) needs to be considered alongside the content of (b) especially in a local Protestant context where theological ‘truth’ and Biblical literacy were held up to be of paramount importance, not only in the lives of individuals, but also in the lives of the village, the nation and the world.

Yet much of what I say in the following chapters will almost certainly be deemed to have missed the point by my Christian informants, and although they would probably use the phrase ‘man’s fallen wisdom’ rather than the phrase ‘too anthropological’, the sense of indictment would be entirely the same. By my comparing evangelical witness to Islamic *da’wa* or by suggesting that preaching is a kind of sacrificial eating of the totem, many of my informants would surely shake their heads at my abominable heresy and be left wondering if I listened to a word of what they had said to me during my fifteen months in the village. And yet while this reaction might perhaps be expected, (as may the reverse charge of being a ‘theological apologist’), I want to suggest that both of these reactions may be helpfully brought into conversation with each other in an attempt to produce a new kind of ethnographic knowledge. My assertion has already been that what is needed is what Charles Taylor (1985) has called a language of perspicuous contrast. It is worth briefly lingering on this point in an attempt to see its import for bringing theology and

anthropology (or indeed ‘committed’ Christians and ‘secular’ social scientists) into conversation with each other. In discussing the difficulty of cross cultural understanding, Taylor has this to say:

...although there is a strong temptation to by-pass agents’ self-descriptions arising from the strong pull of the natural science model, any attempt to do so is stultifying, and leads to an account which cannot be adequately validated. [...] The interpretive view, I want to argue, avoids the two equal and opposite mistakes: on one hand, of ignoring self-descriptions altogether, and... on the other hand, of taking these descriptions with ultimate seriousness, so that they become incorrigible. [...] But if not in their terms, how else can we understand them but in our own? Aren’t we unavoidably committed to ethnocentricity? No, I want to argue, we are not. The error in this view is to hold that the language of cross-cultural theory has to be either theirs or ours. [...] But as a matter of fact, while challenging their language of self-understanding, we may also be challenging ours. [...] In fact, it will almost always be the case that the adequate language in which we can understand another society is not our language of understanding, or theirs, but rather what one could call *a language of perspicuous contrast. This would be a language in which we could formulate both their way of life and ours as alternative possibilities in relation to some human constants at work in both.* It would be a language in which the possible human variations would be so formulated that both our form of life and theirs could be perspicuously described as alternative such variations (Taylor 1985: 123-125. Emphasis added)

Where Taylor rightly envisaged his ‘language of perspicuous contrast’ being applied to the efforts of social scientists seeking after cross-cultural understanding, not only do I want to apply his model to this anthropologically conventional task, but I also want to take his idea a step further. My desire is to see not only the Christians of Gamrie brought into (an inevitably narrow) conversation with the (very few) people who will actually read this thesis, but, more than this, I seek to bring anthropology into a conversation with theology via the voices of those who make up the substance of this thesis. I have sought to achieve such a dialogue by deploying a range of terms – some used by anthropologists, some by theologians and some by both – to describe different ways of life (that is, different ways of conducting material *and* intellectual practice) ‘as alternative possibilities in relation to some human constants at work in both’ (ibid.: 125). Many of these terms have already

been discussed, some have not: ‘words’, ‘the Word’, ‘testimony’, ‘witness’, ‘conversion’, ‘sacrifice’, ‘providence’, ‘immanence’, ‘imminence’ and ‘enchantment’ – these are the tools by which I hope to build up a picture not only of ‘cross-cultural understanding’ (ibid.: 124) but also of cross-disciplinary dialogue.

Where Robbins and Engelke in their introduction to *Global Christianity, Global Critique* (2010) have suggested that putting ‘Christian... categories back at the centre of debates about how to think about society and its potential transformation’ has permitted ‘critical thinkers not just to think *about* religion but also... *with* it’ (Robbins and Engelke 2010: 625), it is my aim that by deploying a ‘language of perspicuous contrast’ throughout the chapters of this thesis, I might be able to bring something productive out of the two-fold charge that my work may be ‘too theological’ and/or ‘too anthropological’. The intention, of course, is that it is neither of these things, but instead would exist as an account of life, that, being constructed out of a language of anthro-theological ‘give and take’, can make sense of what life is like as a Christian in a Scottish fishing village, not only by writing about religion, but also by writing with it.

Outline of the Thesis

Chapters I and II seek to situate Gamrie within its context. Chapter I addresses the historical and broader social context of the village by looking not only at different accounts of local history, but also at the recent sociological themes occurring within Christianity in Scotland. The churches as they exist today are described (both theologically and in terms of church practice) as are the ‘other Gamrics’, that is, those other communities in the village who have little or nothing to do with the life and work of the churches. Chapter II considers how Gamrie is under three types of pressure – economic, demographic and eschatological. In referring to this ‘triple pinch’, I describe how Gamrie – as both a fishing village and a ‘religious’ village – is facing economic uncertainty, demographic decline and eschatological oblivion. I also pose a series of possible counter explanations for social change in Gamrie to show how the broader sociological picture, far from being linear and one-dimensional, is actually made up of a complex constellation of social, economic, political and religious currents.

Chapters III, IV and V examine the relationship between worship and ‘The Word’. In the first part of Chapter III I examine two types of sermonising – ‘preaching’ and ‘teaching’ – and show how these map onto two different categories of persons – the unsaved and the saved. By asking the question ‘why preach the need to be ‘born again’ to ‘born-again’ believers?’, I go on to show how, far from being a hermetically sealed event, sermonising (both preaching and teaching) always requires the postulated existence of its opposite – ‘saved’ persons at gospel preachings and ‘unsaved’ persons at Bible teachings – because they are mutually dependent categories. I end the chapter by suggesting how this mutual dependence is eschatological in nature, framed, as it is, by an anticipation of the end of the world, revealing how sermons are first and foremost symbolic events that unmake, make and remake different types of personhood.

In the second part of Chapter III I shift my attention from preachers as speaking subjects to congregants as listening subjects. Where preaching, locally understood, was said to be an act of reverent worship, I argue that such worship has to be understood anthropologically as a kind of sacrifice. Taking a new perspective on ‘traditional’ anthropological understandings of religious sacrifice as necessarily involving some form of eating (Robertson Smith 1972), I suggest that, when examining the act of preaching as it was experienced by the Christians of Gamrie, what is ‘eaten’ is not flesh but words. In this sense, hearing (‘sitting under’) a sermon, while not construed as an entirely passive act, is also not experienced as an active negotiation between speaker and listener as equals. The aural relationship here is shown to be distinctly hierarchical, primarily concerning one’s (highly personal) relationship with God, transforming preacher into prophet and congregant into a silent consumer of words.

Chapter IV draws on fieldwork among Scottish fishermen and examines the performance of ‘giving testimony’ (the story of becoming a ‘born-again’ Christian) as a kind of autobiographical interview. Utilizing Susan Harding’s evocative suggestion that conversion is not just conversion to a religion, but also to a language, I argue that it is by ‘sincerely’ testifying to a shared religious orthodoxy that the self is both known and made knowable. Key to communicating the sincerity of this performance is the public expression of emotion as a ‘folk’ method for the unmaking and making of persons

through embodied confession. Crucially, conversion narratives are not just directed toward the speaking self but are also explicitly concerned with the listening other. ‘Giving testimony’, then, is also about ‘bearing witness’, that is, it is part of a larger programme of evangelism that seeks to challenge and thereby transform the identity of the hearing other.

Chapter V, on the lived experience of trawling for prawns in the North Sea, is based on fieldwork conducted during two trips while working as a deckhand during my last winter in the field. In this chapter, I bring together my material on sermons and testimony to show how Gamrie’s deep sea prawn trawlers can be ‘read’ as representing the village in miniature. Thus, where both the ‘saved’ and the ‘unsaved’ were forced into physically close and relationally intense quarters, I show how the usually fixed religious and social boundaries of the village were constantly drawn, crossed and re-drawn out at sea in a ‘zero-sum game’ of evangelism and counter-witness that magnified the daily politics of personhood while also bringing them into sharper relief.

Chapters VI and VII examine the relationship between religious immanence/imminence and spiritual enchantment, with attention given to the ways in which experiences of God and the Devil – in everyday life and in fulfilment of Biblical prophecy – constitute a challenge to the suggestion that modern life is experienced as disenchanted (Weber 1978a) and secular (Brown 2001, Bruce 2001). Chapter VI examines local experiences of ‘divine providence’ and ‘demonic attack’, showing how life – glossed as a ‘spiritual battle’ – comes to resemble an enchanted struggle between God and the Devil, with the Christian placed awkwardly in the middle. Because, in this Christian ontology, ‘there is no such thing as coincidence’, providence and spiritual attack were the only two categories left open. Intriguingly, the effect was essentially the same: life was experienced as enchanted.

In Chapter VII I move from stories about the (enchanted) lives of individuals and their families to much larger spiritual concerns about the cosmic conflict between God and the Devil that is being waged at the level of international politics. By making links between local fascination with and support for Israel over and against local fears concerning the

European Union, my aim is to show the multifarious nature of local eschatological anticipation, arguing that such a view of the future can only be understood when proper attention is given to how Gamrics experienced their present as ‘the *last* of the *last* days’.

I conclude the thesis by discussing the relationship between words and objects and suggest that it is only by paying attention to the ‘absolute and incommensurable’ (Lambek 2008) value of ‘The Word’ that an accurate picture of the enchanted religious experiences of the Christians of Gamrie can be gained. Where it is the Bible that animates the enchantment of the logocentric cosmology of my Christian informants, it is this ‘Word’ that is shown to animate the religious lives of my friends. By arguing that the Christians of Gamrie inhabit an enchanted world within a disenchanted village, I suggest that it is this incommensurability that defines the lived religious experience of my informants. By framing my understanding of enchantment through the theological notion of consubstantiation, I suggest that the cosmos of Gamrie’s Christians is defined by the enchanted holism of the immanence and imminence of transcendence. Further, it is the loss of this holism, giving way to a loss of plasticity in the lives of Gamrie’s non-Christian ‘others’ that defines the disenchantment of their own apparently ‘secular’ cosmos, while threatening to sound the death knell of the religion of Gamrie within the next generation. In order for us to begin to see how enchantment and disenchantment could coexist in this way, let us now try and situate the village within its proper context.

Part I: *Gamrie*

Chapter I

Situating Gamrie

The task of ‘situating Gamrie’ requires us to attempt to understand how the social and religious life of the village today is itself experienced as a product of its past. In view of this fact, let us examine Gamrie’s earliest days as well as its less distant revival history in order to gain some perspective on what life is like for both Christians and ‘non-Christians’ in the village.

Gamrie as a Part of Scotland: From 1004 to 20th Century Fundamentalism

As with much of what can be said about the village, Gamrie’s history has been shaped by two dominant forces: religion and fishing. According to one of my informants, himself a keen amateur historian, the village of Powistown was renamed Gardenstown in 1721, originally founded by Peter Garden as a fishing village. While the village received its first mention in parish records in 1190, (the parish being called ‘Gamrie’), the land was initially developed when a church dedicated to St John was constructed to mark the place where, according to local legend, the Scots defeated an invading Danish army in 1004. At this time (and for the next 350 years) Scotland was under the religious control of the Roman Catholic Church, (with Christianity having been first brought to Scotland by St Columba in 563 during his efforts to convert the native Picts (Lehane 2005)).



Fig. 5: Gamrie from the sea, showing the two distinct levels of the village.

After the construction of St John's church yard, it was not until the mid-1500s that the official break with Rome was made during the Scottish Reformation (Donaldson 2008). The religious and political upheaval of 1560 (which birthed the CofS in the same year) saw the rejection of the authority of the Pope, the outlawing of the celebration of the Mass and the eventual instating of the (staunchly Calvinist) Westminster Confession of Faith (ibid.). Yet, by 1582 the CofS was already experiencing its first internal fissure, with a section of the denomination leaving to set itself up as the Scottish Episcopal Church (Cheyne 1998).

By the 1600s things began to change again (first in Europe, then nationally) with the development of Biblical Criticism. This form of thought was given its earliest voice in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* of 1670 in which Spinoza contended that the Bible was a natural text to be subjected to the rigors of intellectual reason and not interpreted through 'faith' via 'revelation'. Spinoza's approach gained credence with two key 18th century Enlightenment thinkers in Germany – Reimarus (1694-1768) and Griesbach (1745-1812) – who further developed the concept that the Biblical text was a product of a long history of human religious tradition and not of divine authorship (see Schweitzer 2009). Such ideas sent shockwaves through the strongly Reformed theology of the CofS, and, at the point where these new creeds converged with the arrival of the Scottish

enlightenment by the mid-1700s (Broadie 2003), the liberalisation of Scottish religious life seemed largely irreversible (Bruce 1990, McCrone 1992).

These pioneers of Biblical Criticism, as well as key figures in the Scottish Enlightenment such as David Hume (Hume 1748) – although not the subject of conversation among the Christians of Gamrie – were responsible for clearing an intellectual path that latterly opened up the way for a much more famous (and locally infamous) 19th century naturalist, Charles Darwin, to expound his views on the genesis of the human race. With his publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 came the (essentially reactionary) formation of the Protestant ‘fundamentalist’ movement in America in the 20th century, with opposition to the theory of evolution (described by some as ‘the religion of the antichrist’) as one of its central tenets. Interestingly, as a religio-political movement, Protestant fundamentalism has only acquired a strong sense of its own coherence since the 1970s, despite the movement itself being over a century old (Marty and Appleby 1994, Eller 2007, Nagata 2001). Thus, where in its earliest years Protestant fundamentalism was largely restricted to the United States, defining itself in terms of five specific theological tenets¹⁰, its contemporary manifestation has a broader and more international agenda, moving beyond the stereotype of scientific creationism to espouse a pro-life, pro-family, anti-evolutionist, anti-gay and anti-welfare stance that is now a considerable political force with which to be reckoned (see Harding 2000).

Over the last century, Gamrie itself has undergone several evangelical ‘revivals’ brought to the town through local fishermen’s connections to the Brethren, producing, over time, a unique local ‘folk theology’ (Coleman 2000) of its own. This strongly conservative brand of Protestantism was said to be particularly fervent during the 1920s, with unusually large numbers of Gamrie fishermen having ‘born again’ conversion experiences as they followed the herring shoals down from Scotland to Plymouth and Portsmouth in the south of England. It was here that Gamrics were said to have first come into contact with the ‘open air’ gospel preaching of the Brethren as they landed their catches at market. It was shortly after this ‘spiritual awakening’, during the 1930s, that

¹⁰ (i) Absolute Biblical inerrancy, (ii) the virgin birth of Christ, (iii) substitutionary atonement of sins by Christ, (iv) the bodily resurrection and Second Coming of Christ, and (v) the divinity of Christ (Eller 2007).

the Brethren movement consolidated its impact upon the village, with large numbers of those in the CofS leaving the Kirk to join the Brethren.

Yet, despite what some of my more zealous Brethren informants would have wanted me to believe, this fundamentalist spirit cannot simply be attributed to divine revelation. Indeed, it seems that everything that had occurred up until this point – internationally, nationally and locally – had been building to provide the ideal historical conditions for the Brethren to flourish. The Reformation, breaking with Rome, began to assert the need for mass Biblical literacy over and against the public performance of religious ritual. This in turn began to promote the importance and validity of individual interpretations of the Bible. The Enlightenment carried this process of personal discovery of (in this case Biblical) knowledge even further, and began the process of combining the search for material evidences of (literal and historical) Biblical inerrancy with the theology of dispensationalism and the eschatological search for ‘signs of the end times’. Finally there was the 20th century swing to fundamentalism: the urgent need to have a personal ‘born-again’ conversion experience joined with the establishment of scientific six-day creationism as the theological response to the claims that evolutionism (ironically, like dispensationalism, itself a product of enlightenment thinking) had ‘disproved’ the Bible.

When one combines these historical factors with the Brethren teaching that *all* men were to be leaders and preachers in the church regardless of theological education¹¹, it is not difficult to see why Brethrenism was so popular among these fishermen: the material world of science and nature (so omnipresent in the lives of men working out at sea) were embraced as indexes of divine presence; individual conscience and the primacy of personal conviction became the highest court of appeal in all matters of religion; a patriarchal system of church governance was combined with a highly devolved system of leadership which placed all men in positions of equal authority over each other (and over female members) – all of this permitted every man to aspire to be ‘his own skipper’ not only at sea, but also in church.

¹¹ Having a professional clergy was said to be a sin against the Holy Spirit insofar as it failed to recognise that God spoke through all.

With each man in authority over everyone, no man, in effect, had the power to tell any other man what to do. Men who had taken orders from nobody during their working week at sea, only to come back to shore to sit under years of autocratic preaching by a lettered ‘incomer’ at the Kirk were now not only being told that formal, educated, professional, top-down church leadership was blasphemy, but that it was their duty, as Christian *men*, to lead a newly revived ‘body of believers’ in whatever direction they felt the ‘Spirit of God’ was prompting. The effects of such an ideology, as we shall see below, were dramatic. But before embarking on this discussion, let me first try and better situate Gamrie within the more modern Scottish context.

Recent social themes concerning religion in Scotland

Over the last fifty years the Christian churches in Scotland have collectively moved from being one of the country’s most influential institutions, to one increasingly squeezed by fierce competition from other social actors. It is to a discussion of the various reasons for this change that I turn to in this section. In it, I consider the three (clearly overlapping) explanations: (i) liberalisation; (ii) ecumenicalism and (iii) secularisation (Webster 2008). I take the first two together, and discuss the (arguably larger and more complex) issue of secularisation on its own.

Liberalisation and Ecumenicalism

One possible explanation for the general decline in the institutional power and influence of the Christian church in modern Scotland is that it has become increasingly affected by liberalisation, both morally and culturally, and also more in favour of, (not to mention dependent upon), ecumenicalism, primarily as a method of sustaining its lifespan (Brown 1997, 2001). While this is likely to be the analysis that many of my informants would agree with, this explanation, (liberalisation + ecumenicalism = secularism), might, actually, more convincingly be said to work in the opposite direction. Indeed, Brown (*ibid.*), Bruce (2001, 2002), Hillis (2002), McCrone (1992) and Voas (2006) have all suggested that liberalisation and ecumenicalism can be seen as largely a reaction to, (not a cause of), the ways in which Scottish society has, particularly since the 1960s, become

ever more 'tolerant' and 'progressive' while growing less interested in being party to the sectarian 'identity politics' that characterised much of the Scottish Presbyterianism of the past.

For Brown, the issue was one of changing trends in popular culture, rather than any complex shifts in the modern Scot's cosmological outlook on life: 'it was *lifestyle rather than ideology* that seemed to instigate religious decline in Scotland' (Brown 1997: 3. Emphasis added). For him, urbanisation was the key social process that heralded the death of piety in Scotland, and, what better evidence of this than the unrivalled urbanity of Glasgow? 'By the time Glasgow was 'European City of Culture' in 1990, and the pubs stayed open until three o'clock in the morning all year long, nobody doubted that religious Scotland was dead' (ibid.: 2). Further, urbanisation brought with it 'a vast new range of occupations... leading to great variation in standard of living, popular culture and religion' (ibid.: 6). The argument, put simply, is that 'the very instability of modern society seemed to threaten the tradition of communal worship and the tranquillity of the agrarian life upon which piety and faith were founded' (ibid.: 8).

Putting aside any obvious objections as to the essentialising nature of concepts such as 'tradition' and 'tranquillity' (ibid.), Brown's point seems clear: the 19th century process of urbanisation, the 20th century development of 'new towns, and the liberalising 'modernity' that both of these processes brought with them led to a more general 'undermining of the received role of religion' (ibid.: 166). In the 1930s Scotland got the radio, in the 1950s it was the TV and in the 1960s it was Bingo. It is not hard to see how this 'boom in...leisure' (ibid.) began to erode some key aspects of Scottish religiosity, perhaps most obviously the Scots' willingness to adhere to the strictures of the 4th Commandment.

Crucially, 'with religious decline came *ecumenicalism*' (ibid.: 7. Emphasis added). The argument is again relatively straightforward – if your shack is falling over, you naturally begin to lean against the shack next door, and happily, no one has to sleep in the mud. Yet ecumenicalism had the detrimental effect of weakening religious identity in Scotland (ibid.: 7-8) by necessarily undermining denominational distinctiveness. The issue, then,

is largely one of an economy of scale. Where Brown argues (not without contention) that church rhetoric tried hard to turn a necessity into a virtue (ibid.), the shadow of decline that spurred on the trends of both liberalisation and ecumenicalism was never far behind.

Further, liberalisation in the wider culture, particularly notable since the 1960s (ibid.: 166-169), did not go unnoticed by the churches. By the 1970s the Episcopal Church had stopped promoting the temperance movement, ceased its opposition to gambling, become more muted in its opposition to abortion, begun to soften in its attitude towards homosexuality and had become a leader in the anti-war movement (ibid.: 169). The Kirk followed suit, and, in some important respects, surpassed the Episcopal Church in its progressive politics, most notably in the decision in 1969 to ordain women, a policy that was not adopted by Episcopalians until 1992.

The cumulative effect of both liberalisation and ecumenicalism is striking, and has been described by Brown as causing a ‘moral metamorphosis’ (ibid.) in Scotland’s churches. What is clear is that, despite the efforts of the churches to strengthen their hand through the ecumenical movement, the seismic effects of the liberalisation of popular Scottish culture is hard to ignore:

For those living through it, the impact of the cultural and then the lifestyle revolutions which started in the 1960s seem inescapably powerful for breaking *religious sensibility and the ecclesiastical grip on everyday life* (ibid.: 174)

While it is the ‘religious sensibilities’ that are particular to the local context of Gamrie with which my research is primarily concerned, it remains ever important to situate these local forms of religiosity within their wider social context. It is this, a consideration of the interplay between the particular and the general, which I have attempted to highlight here, an effort I continue in my discussion of secularisation below.

Secularisation

Perhaps one way of understanding the radical transformation in the fortunes of Christianity in Scotland (and beyond) is to note the titles of some academic pieces written on the subject: 'The Spiral of Decline' (Bruce 1990), 'Christianity in Britain, R. I. P' (Bruce 2001), 'God is Dead' (Bruce 2002), 'The Haemorrhage of Faith' (Brown 1997), 'Religious Decline in Scotland' (Voas 2006), 'Bleeding to Death' (Brierly 2000). Strongly worded stuff. But this literature represents more than just rhetoric, backed up, as it is, by a large and growing body of statistical data showing the catastrophic failure of the fortunes of Christianity, not just in Scotland or in Britain, but across most of Western Europe (Webster 2008).

Brown, in his survey of religion in Scotland over the last three centuries, states in the first two lines of his book that 'religion has shaped much of modern Scotland, yet it is now barely perceptible in the lives of most Scots' (Brown 1997:1). The result, for Brown, was as silent as it was dramatic: 'The puritanical regime of the old Scots religion died with little fuss, fluttering to the ground lighter than a house of cards' (ibid.: 2).

The evidence for such claims is strong. The figures in the 1851 census tell us that as many as 60% of the adult population attended church regularly at the time (Bruce 2001:194). The figure, for England in 1998, had gone down to 7.5% (ibid.: 195). Between 1900 and 2000 the number of clerics in Britain declined by 25% at a time when the population doubled (ibid.: 199). In 1971, 60% of British marriages were conducted in churches, the figure in 2000 has almost halved (ibid.). The claim that decline in attendance at mainstream Churches has been largely offset by growth in new religious movements (Davie 1994 also Stark 1999) is difficult to sustain, accounting, as they do, for less than a sixth of the loss (Bruce 2001:200). In the 1950s, 43% of the adult population believed in a 'personal creator God' – the figure in 2000 had declined to 26%. Unbelief in such a God has risen from 2% in the 50s to 27% in the 1990s. If these current trends of decline continue, several mainline denominations (most notably the Methodists) will cease to exist in Britain by 2031 (ibid.: 197).

But what of Scotland? 'It is evident that by *any measure* religious adherence in Scotland is lower now than in the past' (Voas 2006: 107). Religious mobility is flowing like one way traffic: 'The main movement [in Scotland] has been into no religion; whereas most people raised in no religion remain in that state, *many raised in a religion now have none*' (ibid.: 109). Protestantism has suffered most: '...for Protestants, it is clear that each generation has been less religious than the last' (ibid: 111). With this change, we see a change 'from [Scottish popular culture] being more or less Christian to more or less not during the 1960s' (ibid.: 112). And what of Aberdeen and the North East? The Aberdeen area now has the lowest church attendance in all of Scotland (Hillis 2002) despite a population explosion from roughly 73,000 in 1851 to 200,000 in 1991 (ibid.: 709-710). In 1851 approximately 39% of Aberdeen's population went to Church. The figure was down to just 9% in 1994 (ibid.: 711). Where the Aberdeen picture is bleaker for the churches than most, the Scotland-wide picture is far from rosy: 'One out of every two Scots sees themselves as neither a religious nor a spiritual person' (Glendinning 2006: 589).

But what do all these statistics mean for the 'inter-subjective experience' (Knibbe and Versteeg 2008) of human religiosity in Scotland? It is not easy to say – there has been relatively little research into the ways in which these 'macro' structural changes have impacted upon local landscapes of 'micro' religiosity in all their richness, particularity and peculiarity. It is this 'failure of communication', as it were, between the 'macro' and 'micro' approaches that my research seeks to highlight and then begin to redress, at least in the fairly specific field of the anthropology of Christianity in Scotland (Webster 2008). As for now, answering this question will necessitate a return to our previously used sources. For Brown, then, the statistics suggest that we are likely to see a dramatic shrinking in the size of the sphere of religion in Scotland, as well as a decline in its socio-cultural significance:

The stewardship of Scottish society is vested in generations which have become overwhelmingly 'secular' in their culture and thinking. The churches may not disappear, but Scotland is sharing with the rest of Western Europe the rapid dissolution of Christian society (Brown 1997:174).

‘Very soon’, Brown argues, ‘funerals will be the only occasion when the majority of Scots participate in a religious ceremony’ (ibid.: 65).

What are we to conclude from all of this? Is God really dead as Bruce tells? (Bruce 2002)? Is the God of the Scottish Reformation now only a God of funerals? This would be a difficult claim to sustain for Gamrie, which appears to be resisting the trends of liberalisation, ecumenicalism and secularisation. With such a concentration of self-proclaimed Protestant fundamentalism, Gamrie is clearly not a very ‘liberal’ place. With six different churches, all of which have almost nothing to do with each other, Gamrie is clearly not a very ecumenical place. With Church attendance remaining at levels far closer to those reported in 1851 than to those of the 2000s, Gamrie does not appear to be a very secular place (Webster 2008). In an attempt to explain why, at first glance at least, Gamrie seems very much to be the exception to the rule, we may now consider the more recent history of the churches in Gamrie.

Since the ‘Revival’: Recent Splits and Mergers in Gamrie

The effect of the radically individualist Protestantism that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries as a result of both the Reformation and the Enlightenment, was highly schismatic, as the history of the churches in Gamrie shows (fig. 7). Many left the Kirk to worship with various Brethren sects, and of those who stayed, many appeared to have strong sympathies with Brethren theology: since the 1850s, those in the Kirk have adopted Brethren eschatology largely in its entirety, are almost completely teetotal, and favour adult (believer’s) baptism. As discussed further below, women in the Kirk are given very limited opportunities for public involvement in the church – something that goes against the grain of ‘official’ CofS policy but is in line with local Brethren thinking. Given this influence, I want to start by discussing the Brethren.

The Brethren

The Brethren arrived in the village in the 1850s, shortly after they were founded by John Nelson Darby in Dublin in the 1830s. About a hundred years after they were founded,

Gamrie underwent the 1921 'Herring Revival', establishing Brethrenism as a major player on the local religious scene beside Presbyterianism. By 1946 the Brethren experienced their first major split caused by irreconcilable differences in theological opinion over adult (OB) vs. infant (CB) baptism. Having locally established the 'Open' and 'Closed' labels by 1946, the baptism issue remains *the* distinguishing feature that separated the two groups. Since this time, Gamrie's OB have not experienced further structural fission, largely because when theological or personality disagreements arise, an 'official' split is avoided by local dissenters simply leaving to worship at their next nearest OB hall.

The CB however – in marked contrast to the dominant trend towards ecumenicalism in Scotland (Bruce 2002, Hillis 2002, McCrone 1992) – not permitting such internal disagreements to be dealt with simply by switching assembly (instead requiring conflicts be resolved by the excommunication of individuals or formal institutional division) have experienced more schism as a result. Much of this schism was said to have occurred because of the influence of one man, Jim Taylor Jr., the leader of the 'Exclusive Brethren' (EB), a sect considered to be fundamentalist even by the very conservative standards of the CB. According to a number of my informants, Taylor Jr. pushed two particular Brethren teachings – on 'separation' from the world and on the liberty of Christians to consume alcohol – to their extreme, leading to the fragmentation of the CB and his own downfall. On 'separation', Taylor Jr. introduced new rules that made even casual associations between EB and non-EB members almost impossible. Perhaps most controversially, an edict from Taylor Jr. that EBs could not eat with non-EBs led to situations where the children of those in the EB (who were not themselves in membership) could not eat at the same table as their parents. Crucially for Gamrie, those in the EB were not permitted to work with those outside the movement, meaning that many EB skippers who had non-EB crew were forced to sell their boats and give up fishing because of the impossibility of finding suitable EB replacements. It was this edict that caused the 1961 'breakaway' – made up of several high profile EB skippers local to Gamrie who refused to sell their boats and dissolve their business, instead reverting back to Closed Brethrenism as it existed before Taylor Jr.

The second split caused by Taylor Jr., the 1970 ‘Aberdeen Incident’, was as a result of personal scandal. Having promoted the use of alcohol among EB members as a key mark of ‘Christian liberty’, many, having come from long lines of Presbyterian teetotallers, quickly fell into alcoholism. Taylor Jr. was also said to have developed the disease with serious consequences to the credibility of his ministry. Things came to a head when Taylor Jr. was found, apparently drunk, naked, in bed with another man’s wife. Days after the scandal hit the newspapers¹² those in Gamrie who had remained loyal to Taylor Jr. post 1961 left the EB movement, reverting back to Closed Brethrenism, yet remaining as a separate assembly.

More splits followed, this time among the CB ‘Breakaways’ over a range of disagreements about how worship should be conducted – conflicts that were themselves exacerbated by personality clashes. Specifically, two key families had personal connections to the Assemblies of God (AoG) and sought to bring this Pentecostal influence to the form of worship at Gamrie’s Braehead Hall. A more explicitly evangelistic focus was sought by these ‘modernisers’, as was the use of contemporary Christian music and instruments such as guitars and a drum kit. Women were also given more opportunity to take part in the service and eventually a woman was asked to preach. Such changes caused two different splits, the first one in 1990, birthing today’s Seatown CB Hall, and the second, in 1999 (known locally as ‘the scattering’), which further fragmented the fellowship without leading to the creation of a new assembly. Since leaving the field in 2009, those dozen or so members who remained at the Braehead Hall have forged formal links with the ‘Harvest Centre Riverside Christian Fellowship’ in Banff, a charismatic church which is seeking to resuscitate Braehead by bussing in young Christians who hold contemporary ‘worship celebration’ services as an ‘evangelistic outreach’ for the ‘spiritually lost’ Gamrie youth.

¹² See for example the Sunday Mirror, August 16th 1970 which ran with the headline: ‘The Woman in Big Jim’s Bed’ (Peebs.net 2011).

The Presbyterians

It would be wrong – especially given the events of the last fifteen years – to suggest that the Brethren had a monopoly on religious division and institutional schism in Gamrie. While the history of Presbyterianism in Gamrie during the late 19th and early 20th century was a history of mergers (with the United Presbyterian Church merging with the United Free Church, which merged again with the CofS), the history of the last two decades has provided the opposite trend. In 1995 the local Gamrie Kirk split over a decision handed down by the CofS General Assembly that homosexual inclinations were not, in and of themselves, sufficient to bar a person from entering into training for the ministry as long as that person was not a practicing homosexual. There were those in the Gamrie Kirk however (including Robert Walker, the minister at the time) who thought it was sufficient grounds for a bar and left the denomination in protest to set up the Gardenstown Independent Evangelical Church. Shortly after this departure, this new congregation made it clear to Rev. Walker, that, despite having followed him out of the Kirk to form an independent church, they no longer wanted him as their minister. Walker then left Gamrie, accepting a call to a church in Mississippi.

This marked a new chapter in the history of Presbyterianism in the village, with Gardenstown Independent Evangelical Church forming, as a result of personal connections, close (but informal) ties with the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster (FPCU), the denomination founded by Ian Paisley in 1951. By 1998 an FPCU minister was sent to Gamrie for a summer to provide pulpit supply. When the congregation asked that he become their minister, he accepted their ‘call’ on the condition that the church give up its independent status and become Free Presbyterian. This was agreed, the merger was formalised and Rev. Noel Hughes became the first FPCU minister in Gamrie. Over the next 12 years the congregation’s relationship with Rev Hughes soured, some say as a result of his unwavering faithfulness to the theological principles of the FPCU, and others as a result of personality clashes. The situation hit a low during the fifteen months of my fieldwork, and, just weeks after I left, Hughes accepted a call to a FPCU congregation in Northern Ireland, leaving the very much diminished Gamrie FPCU to consider its options. The congregation remains without a minister.

Around the same time that the Gamrie FPCU was having major problems, the Gamrie Kirk underwent a crisis of its own. The conflict, occurring in the Aberdeen Presbytery, was as a result of the appointment of an openly gay minister to Aberdeen Queen's Cross Church, who planned to move, with his partner, into the manse. The Gamrie Kirk, having remained relatively united during the decision making process by joining the evangelical pressure group The Fellowship of Confessing, looks set to split from the CofS in view of the fact that gay ministers have, to all intents and purposes, been formally accepted into the denomination after a General Assembly ruling in May 2011.



Fig. 6: View up the brae to the Gamrie Kirk.

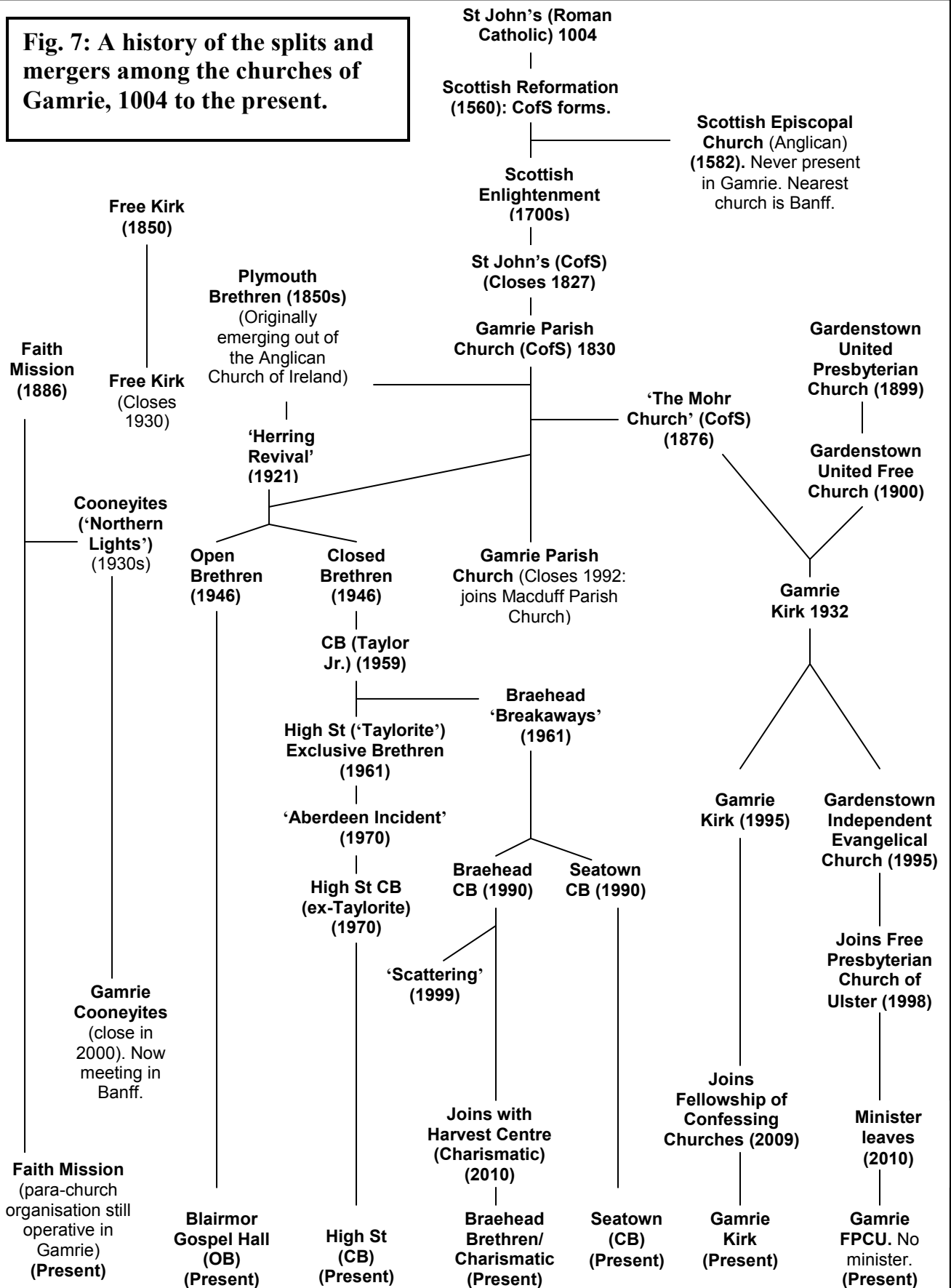
The Orphans

There are also two other groups who appear to be 'orphaned', that is, left without any real connection to other local churches. They are the 'Free Kirk' and the 'Cooneyites', (also known locally as the 'Northern Lights'). The 'Free Kirk' (about a mile outside the village, in the countryside) was the one church about which I could glean almost no information. Local people were not sure if this was originally a Free Church of Scotland, a United Presbyterian Church of Scotland or a United Free Church of Scotland. All I

could establish with any degree of consensus was that it opened in 1850, only to close again in 1930, for what reasons I am unsure. For whatever reason, the church elicited about as much local interest as my questions did useful information.

Finally, beyond the fact that they are a breakaway from the Faith Mission, I also know little about the local history of Cooneyites. Having attended their meetings less than half a dozen times I also know comparatively little about their contemporary formation in northeast Scotland. I did have one friend in Gamrie who, up to 2000, hosted a small fellowship of Cooneyites in the village. The tiny Restorationist sect, founded by William Irvine (in Scotland) and Edward Cooney (in Ireland) in the early 1900s (Megahey 2000), refuses to take any official name for itself and rejects all other churches as apostate. Similar to the Brethren, they also reject the idea that the ministry should be a paid profession, but unlike the Brethren, they further reject the use of permanent church buildings, choosing to meet in rented village halls and the homes of followers. Unusually, the group permit women to preach – the majority of their itinerant evangelists (who all practice what they call a ‘homeless ministry’) are women. Perhaps most controversially, Cooneyites claim that salvation can only be gained by listening to their own preachers, a claim that had led many Gamrics to view this group not as a sect, but a cult. The group folded in Gamrie in 2000 due to lack of members and now meets in a home in Banff.

Fig. 7: A history of the splits and mergers among the churches of Gamrie, 1004 to the present.



The Churches Today

Whilst all Gamrie's churches have slight differences in both doctrinal emphasis and ordering of worship, what they all have in common is a strong attachment to 'the need to be saved' (formulated as a personal and deeply transformative rupture of the old sinful self from the new 'born again' self, defined by a life of ongoing repentance), 'believing the Bible' (claiming both literal interpretation and personal application) and 'spreading the gospel' (where all of daily life is redefined as an explicitly evangelistic exercise).



Fig. 8: High Street (CB) Hall

To outsiders, all six of the churches have a distinctly 'fundamentalist' feel to them – the sermons, sometimes lasting over an hour, are the focal point of most services and are centrally concerned with the problem of human sinfulness and the need to be 'washed in the blood' of Jesus in order to be 'born again'. The buildings themselves are remarkably bare, with almost no adornment apart from banners and posters displaying various Biblical texts (figs. 8-12). Old-fashioned revivalist hymns are sung either without music or, where instrumentation is permitted, with an electric organ. People dress formally and

while quiet chatting is permitted before the service at some churches, others expect silence to be kept at the outset. Almost all of those in attendance (including children) bring their own Bible to church, many of which, despite being leather bound, are well worn, tatty looking and often heavily annotated (recognised locally as signs of true Christian commitment). In most cases women are required to wear long skirts and head coverings, and in some churches are not permitted to speak at all during worship.



Fig. 9: Gamrie Gospel Hall (Open Brethren).



Fig. 10: Gamrie Gospel Hall, interior showing Scripture banner and baptismal tank open.



Fig. 11: Boddam Evangelical Church (near Peterhead). Typical interior of an independent evangelical church.



Fig. 12: Macduff (Closed Brethren) Hall. Open for occasional meetings.

Local Name	Denom.	Size	Dominant Age	Gender Roles	Bible Version	Music Style	Dress Code	Communion Practice	Baptism Practice	Views on Alcohol
Kirk	C of S	80+	Some young children and middle aged. Mostly 60+ Relatively large Sunday school (n=30)	M only leadership (informally and contra to national C of S policy) F can pray aloud and do readings	Mainly NIV with others	Organ and hymns Some modern choruses	Various. Older dress more formally	Open to all professing Christians. Six times a year?	Officially infant baptism yet no babies baptised in living memory. Adult ('believers') baptism strongly favoured	No official line. Many teetotal. Drinking in moderation expected but not backed by formal church discipline
Gospel Hall	Open Brethren	40	60+ Very small Sunday school (n=4)	M completely dominant F silent	KJV in general	No instruments Mostly 19 th and early 20 th C revivalist hymns	M dark suits. F head coverings and long skirts	Closed table. Open Brethren membership or letter of introduction generally required. Weekly.	Adult ('believers') baptism only	Strictly tee total. Condition of membership
Irish Church	FPCU	30	Some in late middle age. Most 60+ Very small Sunday School (n=6)	M leadership and dominant F can pray aloud	Strictly KJV only Trinitarian Bible Society member	Organ. Mostly 19 th and early 20 th C revivalist hymns	M dark suits. F head coverings and long skirts	Open to all professing Christians. F generally required to wear head covering. Monthly?	No official position. Left to the conscience of individual ministers.	Strictly tee total. Condition of membership
Seatown Hall	Closed Brethren	20	Some children and middle aged. Mostly 60+ No Sunday school	M completely dominant F silent	Darby	No instruments Own ('Little Flock') hymn book	M dark suits. F head coverings and long skirts	Strictly closed table. Closed Brethren membership and letter of introduction always required. Weekly.	'Household' (infant) baptism of the children of members	Alcohol permitted and used relatively widely. Moderation expected
Braehead Hall	Brethren/charismatic	12	60+ (some teens- 30s bussed in). Youth service (developed post-fieldwork).	M dominant in the past, now much more equal F can lead, preach, pray etc.	Wide range	Piano and other instruments Various hymns and choruses	Generally informal. Older dress more formally	Open to all professing Christians. Weekly.	Adult ('believers') baptism only	No official line. Many tee total
High Street Hall	Closed Brethren	6-8	All 70s-80s. No Sunday school	M completely dominant (only two M in attendance) F silent	Darby	No instruments Own ('Little Flock') hymn book	M dark suits. F head coverings and long skirts	Strictly closed table. Closed Brethren membership and letter of introduction always required. Weekly.	'Household' (infant) baptism of the children of members	Alcohol permitted and used relatively widely. Moderation expected

Fig. 13: Summary of various aspects of church life and practice broken down by denomination.

As fig. 13 shows, the similarities that exist between the different churches and halls are more numerous than the differences. Take gender roles for example: although the Braehead Hall seems to be the exception to this rule (as was often the case more generally due to their being influenced by Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity), men, by and large, dominated all aspects of formal and informal church life, maintaining this position on the basis that such a model was (according to the vast majority of my male and female informants) the only truly Biblical one. This is even the case in the Gamrie Kirk despite the fact that the CofS as a national denomination has ordained women ministers since 1969 and strongly expects all churches to have both male and female Elders. Clothing was also strongly gendered: many wore (as a matter of conscience) plain, muted clothes; men wore suits and women wore (generally unadorned) blouses, skirts and hats. Where clothing was most strongly gendered among the Brethren (women were not permitted to wear trousers, were discouraged from wearing jewellery and makeup and were required to have their hair long and covered) this was not as strictly enforced in the Kirk where women wore trousers and makeup and many choose not to wear hats.

Music was another strong marker of similarity. While some used an organ and others did not, many of the hymns sung in the Kirk were also sung among the different Brethren groups, with the same slow pace and sombre tone. The lyrics were often heavily focused on human sinfulness, the violence of the crucifixion and the deliverance of the Second Coming of Christ. While each church had its favoured hymnal, all of them had strikingly similar topical indexes used to divide the hymns into sections – ‘worship’, ‘the Godhead’, ‘the Holy Scriptures’, ‘the Gospel’, ‘consecration and holiness’, ‘the Lord’s coming’ and so on – which, when taken together, were seen as summing up the totality of the life of the Christian.

Attitudes towards alcohol were something of a common denominator, often becoming a local litmus test for the health and orthodoxy of anyone – and any church – claiming to be Christian. While the CB did permit moderate consumption of alcohol, all the other fellowships were, either officially or unofficially teetotal. Public consumption of alcohol was strictly taboo; bars and pubs were abhorred as ‘the devils lair’ as one informant put it

to me. Combine all of these attitudes with a general atmosphere of reverence and serious contemplation during all church activities and it becomes easy to understand how Gamrie had a local reputation for stark religious intensity.

Looking beyond the immediate bounds of the village (fig. 14), the 65 mile stretch of coast running from Boddam in the southeast to Findochty in the west contains dozens of churches and meeting halls, the majority of which are either Brethren, Pentecostal or independent evangelical; it is within this coastal Protestant fishing region that Gamrie – and my research – is geographically and ‘spiritually’ situated.



Fig. 14: Map showing Banff, Macduff, Gamrie (A), Fraserburgh and Peterhead (Google Maps 2011).

Other Gamrics: The Village of the Damned

Yet it would be wrong to give the impression that the population of Gamrie is almost entirely elderly and all staunchly religious. This is simply not the case. While in one sense Gamrie is bounded by cliffs and the sea and thus physically held together as a single space, there is another sense in which it is a very diverse place with an assortment of different communities making up a collection of socially very different Gamries. Take the local teenage boys for example, who, being too young to drive or without cars of their

own, spend their summer evenings playing football at the park and their winter evenings hanging around the bus shelters, chatting and joking and smoking cigarettes. Or the older lads who spend the early evening cruising up and down the braes in their modified cars and then park at the harbour late at night to play music from their stereos. Most of these ‘loons’, in their teens and early twenties have not only their youth and boredom in common, but also their work – going out to sea for the fishing, making good money and spending it on what they please. These young boys and men are conspicuously absent from the churches, are vocal about having no interest in Christian things and are happy to flout the taboos their parents and grandparents observed, particularly regarding alcohol, a fact that seems to further confirm Brown’s assertion that the liberalisation of lifestyles played an important role in instigating religious decline (Brown 1997: 3). Thus, when traditional ‘blackenings’ occur¹³ (figs. 15-16) it is now accompanied by heavy public drinking, much to the chagrin of the older generations.



Fig. 15: A traditional ‘blackening’ before a wedding.

¹³ A ritual where the groom, shortly before the wedding, is dressed in women’s clothes and covered in ‘blackening’ (traditionally soot and engine oil) and then paraded around the village. See Knipe (1984:124) for a more detailed account of a blackening he witnessed in Gamrie in 1981.



Fig. 16: The groom-to-be (centre) with friends after his 'blackening'.

Another noticeable sub-group within the village is the art community. These well educated, middle class, generally English retirees buy houses in the Seatown and travel up to Gamrie to spend their summers painting and bird watching and drinking wine on the seafront. Artists have attracted other artists, and there are now several small 'galleries' where these seasonal residents occasionally show and sell their work to each other and to day-trippers. This community is largely isolated from the religious life of the village – 'we don't bother them and they don't bother us' was a memorable comment voiced by one particular painter when I asked what contact she had with the Christians whose CB hall was just yards from where she had her studio. Such is the established nature of this group, that one couple have actually set up the 'Creative Retreat' (fig. 17), a business where they teach, hold exhibitions, and host professional artists by offering a 'winter residency' scheme.

Holiday makers come to the village, some for months at a time, others for a week or just a few days. Many are walkers and keen photographers. These guests, transient as they are, have no real notion of the religion in the village and do not, as a result, tend to follow informal expectations with regards to Sunday observance. The same is also so with local

day-trippers, some of whom are said to come to the village to launch kayaks from the harbour during the Sunday services because they know that none of the trustees (all retired Christian fishermen) will be present to collect the relevant fee. Other ‘incomers’ with boats berthed in Gamrie harbour choose to distance themselves from local religiosity in more enduring ways (fig. 18).



Fig. 17: The ‘Creative Retreat’ art studio in Gamrie.



Fig. 18: Pointedly resisting the local tradition of naming boats after Biblical subject matters.

There are still others drawn to the area for its natural coastal beauty – with a relatively numerous supply of council houses in the village, and (at one time) fairly cheap private properties for sale – several young families from England moved to the area in search of the ‘good life’ away from the trials of the big cities. These families, with no religious affiliation, found it almost impossible to integrate into school and community life, especially given the level of anti-English sentiment said to be particularly strong among young local families. Finally, some ‘incomers’ without children moved to the village not in search of the ‘good life’ *per se*, but out of more strictly environmentalist motives. The Cetacean Research and Rescue Unit (fig. 19), is a Scottish charity based in the village that conducts research into the dolphin and whale populations who inhabit the surrounding coastal waters. As with the artists, these environmentalists had little contact with my Christian informants, using their site in the Seatown as a base of operations rather than a place of permanent residence.



Fig. 19: Cetacean Research Unit, Gamrie. Launching the research boat (CRRU 2011)

Perhaps the most controversial ‘sub-culture’ within Gamrie were the bikers. These (generally middle aged) ‘rockers’, both Scottish and English, were – simply by virtue of

being highly visible – an often talked about minority. Leather jackets, tattoos, piercings, shaved heads, thick heeled and metal rimmed boots, flashing chrome and roaring exhausts all combined to make this group the seeming antithesis of the quiet but staunchly religious elderly Christians of Gamrie. I remember attending a ‘breaking of bread’ service one Sunday morning at the Open Brethren when about a dozen motorbikes flashed past the pitted glass windows of the hall with a deafening thunder of engines. An elderly woman turned to me, presumably noting my surprise, and mouthed the word ‘bikers!’ nodding with a frown only to turn again to the front platform. The local reputation of these individuals was, as one might expect, not very good. Many were accused of being ‘druggies’, and with locally high incidences of heroin addiction both in Gamrie and the surrounding towns and villages, some were also suspected of being drug dealers. I became friends with one of the bikers during my fieldwork, largely on account of my own method of transport. The fact that I rode a scooter did not seem to bother him as much as I thought it would – ‘two wheels is two wheels’ he used to tell me.

What joined all of these ‘others’ of Gamrie – the boys at the bus shelters, the young men in their modified cars, the artists, the ‘English incomer’ families, the holiday makers, the kayakers, the environmentalists, the bikers – was, as far as my main group of Christian informants were concerned, the fact that they were all ‘unsaved’. These groups were, in this sense, united insofar as they constituted the village of the damned. This was the case because the ‘gospel message’ I outline in Chapter III was so starkly described in terms of being either ‘for’ or ‘against’ Jesus; being ‘heaven bound’ or ‘hell bound’; being ‘born again’ or being ‘dead in sin’. What mattered, in the eyes of my Christian informants, was that these neighbours of theirs (some of whom were ‘local’ but many of whom were ‘incomers’) were heading for a ‘lost eternity’. Thus, while on one level there were many Gamries typified by many different sub-communities, on another level, *there were really only two kinds of people in Gamrie*; the saved and the damned. It is this tension between social heterogeneity and religious duality, then, which animates much of the context of this research. Having looked, then, at how the present is experienced as a product of the past, let us now turn our attention to how the future is imagined as a product of the present.

Chapter II

The Triple Pinch

As a final attempt at situating Gamrie within its historical, present and future context, I want to consider how Gamrics (and particularly the Christians of Gamrie) were experiencing three types of pressure in their lives – economic, demographic and eschatological. In order to understand the nature of these pressures, I want first to take another look at the regional link between Christianity and fishing.

Christianity and Fishing in Northeast Scotland

Despite a drop of over 5% in the total volume of fish landed in northeast Scotland between 2007 and 2008 (with a 12% drop in white fish), the role of the fishing industry is impossible to miss in northeast Scotland, with Fraserburgh Harbour (fig. 20) remaining the largest shellfish port in the UK and Peterhead the UK's largest white fish port (FIS 2009). In 2001, 5% of Fraserburgh's workforce and 4% of Peterhead's workforce were employed in the fishing industry (national average 0.3%) (SCROL 2001) and in 2008, Peterhead landed 113,000 tonnes of fish (at a total value of £100 million) and Fraserburgh 28,000 tonnes (total value £52 million). Such facts are particularly striking for Fraserburgh, given that between 1996 and 2008 the port suffered a 28% loss in its total fish landings (FIS 2009). This is in part explained by the fact that shellfish values in the northeast have increased by over 94% since 1996 (FIS 2009). Because of the continued presence of the fishing industry in the northeast, both Fraserburgh and Peterhead still have a 'Fishermen's Mission' – a Christian charity that provides chaplaincy services to the industry – despite the fact that many other Mission centres across the UK have closed in recent years. Both centres have a distinctly evangelical (and largely male) leadership, with both, at various times, also functioning as churches in their own right.



Fig. 20: Mending nets at Fraserburgh Harbour.

Fraserburgh and Peterhead were key field sites for my research and, when it came to both the religion and the fishing industry, these two towns felt, in many respects, like larger versions of Gamrie. Both Fraserburgh¹⁴ and Peterhead¹⁵ have a high concentration of conservative Protestant churches, many emerging as a result of histories of schism similar to that found in Gamrie. Fraserburgh alone has eighteen churches from several different denominations including the Assemblies of God, Baptist, Elim (Pentecostal), Immanuel (charismatic), United Reformed, Open Brethren, Closed Brethren, Salvation Army, two independent evangelical churches, four CofS churches, a Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall and a Roman Catholic Church. Historically, as with Gamrie, the Brethren were very influential, with Peterhead being home to the only Exclusive Brethren hall remaining in Scotland's northeast today. But while fishing – and the religion of fishermen – was a significant element of the contextual picture of northeast Scotland, it was not the only element; other forces exerted change over the area, and it is to these that I now want to turn.

¹⁴ Population 12,500 (SCROL 2001).

¹⁵ Population 18,000 (SCROL 2001).

The Triple Pinch

I want to argue that the Christians of Gamrie, (whose stories and experiences I have chosen to focus on for the majority of this thesis), while clearly not the only social subgroup in the village, were unique in so far as they found themselves teetering on the edge of a three way precipice, looking down into economic, demographic and spiritual oblivion. Significantly, these Gamrics were acutely aware of the situation they faced: intense economic insecurity, a demographic time bomb and the imminent apocalypse. These forces were hemming them in, producing a powerful sense of foreboding about the future. It is these changes, and the way they come together to form what I will call the ‘triple pinch’ of economy, demography and eschatology, that will frame the remainder of this chapter.

I am aware that in presenting the ‘bigger picture’ of Christian Gamrie in terms of a ‘triple pinch’, there is a danger that the reader will be left with a contextually over-determined sense of religious life of the village, that is, they will be left with a picture that is rather too flat and tidy to properly encapsulate the sense of confusion – the sense of being spiritually and socially ‘out of place’ in one’s own village – that was so often described to me by my elderly Christian informants. In order to recapture this complex sense of loss (the sense that the village was ‘like a foreign land these days’), I want to consider a few alternative explanations for the decline in the fortunes of ‘Christian things’ in Gamrie alongside the triple pinch. My purpose here is to highlight both complication and contradiction; by discussing the limitations of my analysis I also aim to clarify its interpretative strengths and insights. I want to start with the first pinch, economy.

Pinch One: Economy

Of Gamrie’s 733 residents, 302 are in some kind of employment, over a third of whom are employed within the ‘skilled trades’ occupations. Only 38% are classed as ‘employees’ (national average 51%) whereas 20% are ‘self employed’ (national average 7%). Of those aged between 16 and 74, 40% have no educational qualifications (national average: 33%) and only 16% have a degree or other professional qualification (national

average: 19%). Further, the average working week for men in Gardenstown is 55 hours – significantly higher than the national average of 43 hours. The picture is different for women, (working 28 hours a week compared to a national average of 32), many of whom are left to run the household while their husbands are away at sea. Despite some shrinking in the fishing industry across much of the northeast, fishing still directly accounts for 16% of the local workforce (national average 0.3%). The village is also increasingly dependent on tourism: Gamrie has six self-catering cottages, a bed and breakfast and a hotel. The local economy appears strong by many of these indicators; with no one in the village of working age having ‘never worked’ (national average 9%) and less than 2% classed as ‘currently unemployed’ (national average 4%) (SCROL 2001)¹⁶.

Further, there are clear advantages in providing a materialist reading of what we might want to call Gamrie’s ‘religion of fishing’. This is the case insofar as the fortunes of the local religion seem dependent upon the continued health of the economy. When we turn our attention towards the specific local configuration of Protestantism as we find it ‘on the ground’ in places like Gamrie, Fraserburgh and Peterhead we begin to notice the importance of local money.

The key ingredient here was a general swing towards ‘non-conformist’ Christianity, that is, to a type of Protestantism that was characterised not only as free from state interference (the charge often levelled against the ‘established’ religions of Episcopalianism and the CofS), but also free from the control of ordained ministers of any kind. Brethrenism was said to be truly ‘Free’ in this sense as it was governed instead by as wide a body of local men as was possible. These men were not required to have any formal theological (or any other kind of) education and undertook no training before entering into public leadership. Far from being a weakness, this was held to be a tremendous strength – the laity were said to be reliant ‘neither on books nor on Man’s wisdom’ but rather ‘upon the Holy Spirit alone’. Others were not so sure: ‘They’re their own bosses at sea and their own bosses in their [religious] meeting[s]; every man is his

¹⁶ Because this 2001 census data is pre-recession, some indicators, such as unemployment, may have changed.

own skipper and he can go *wherever* he likes’ said one Presbyterian minister with pointed criticism.

Crucially, shortly after Brethrenism began to take hold in the northeast, the movement started to splinter (see fig. 7). Where fierce adherence to the ‘singular truth of the Bible’ collided with multiple interpretations of both Word and Sacrament, conflict arose and splits occurred, birthing various new Pentecostal, charismatic and independent evangelical churches. These then proceeded to split and split again, giving rise to the dozens of Protestant groupings scattered across the northeast coast of Scotland that we see today. Importantly, with this highly ‘Free’ form of Protestantism (that could not draw support from a wider national denomination) came a heavy dependence upon those who made up the local congregation. Further, this dependence was not just about committing one’s time, but also one’s money. Thus, whilst ministers’ wages were not required, meeting halls needed to be rented and heated; preachers had their travel expenses paid and missionaries abroad and full time evangelists at home needed supporting, none of which was particularly cheap. All of this is to say that the local religion, being locally funded, was (and is) dependent on the health of the local economy in order to ‘stay in business’. Were the economic foundations of herring and prawns to go into decline, then the impact upon Gamrie’s religion would be marked – foreign missions would cease, gospel campaigns would dry up and halls would close and fall into disrepair.

Yet, for now at least, the economic foundation of fishing appears relatively stable. This may explain (within the confines of the Scottish context) some of Gamrie’s continued religiosity in contrast to the ‘heathenism’ of other parts of the east coast further north. Wick, for instance, where the fishing industry has all but died, appears to have very little ‘going on’ when it comes to religion in general and independent Protestantism in particular; with no Brethren halls, the Kirk seems to have maintained something of a dominant role. If we were to move west to Ullapool, Gairloch, Skye or Lewis, the ecclesiastical (and industrial) picture would be different again. The fishing industry, while not having reached Wick’s irretrievable low, is struggling in these places nonetheless. Yet the religion remains very much alive. This is the case, I suggest, because the west coast still remains dominated by the centrally funded Free Church of Scotland

and is thus less susceptible to micro economic change in the way that we could expect Brethrenism to be.

However, while Gamrie, Fraserburgh and Peterhead's fisheries seem to be standing firm in a way that simply cannot be said to be the case for the far north or the west of Scotland, the slow creep of industrial change cannot be denied. Three forces of change are being exerted upon the fishing industry of northeast Scotland: (i) regulation, (ii) competition and (iii) concentration. I want to take each in turn.

Firstly, the (hotly contested and highly politicised) issue of decline in fish stocks has led the EU to regulate fishing methods and introduce quotas. This has squeezed many skippers economically as the cost of buying quotas increases and species that are caught without a licence must, by law, be dumped. During my time working on the trawlers, dozens of tons of (drowned) fresh fish were thrown back to sea because either the boat's quota had already been caught or the boat did not have a licence for a particular species. Interestingly, this was a problem that was 'read' as a sign of the nearness of the end times, based on a belief that the EU was the anti-Christ and that the Devil was using the quota system as a way of gaining control over food production in order to enslave the human race via a future imposition of worldwide famine. Whether or not the EU did have ulterior spiritual motives in reality or not is irrelevant to my discussion here. What matters is that EU regulation of Scotland's fishing industry was hurting skippers and their crews economically and causing them to worry about the long term viability of the industry.

Secondly, increased competition from both foreign fisherman (particularly from Norway and the Faroe Isles) and the Scottish oil industry was hurting the fishing industry economically. This meant that fish prices were being pushed down as, for example, herring caught in Norwegian waters was being sold in Peterhead. Equally, as boys in their mid teens prepared to leave school to enter the world of work, increasing numbers were 'going into the oil' as opposed to fishing. The same was also true of some veteran fishermen who were making the sideways move from the trawlers to the rigs and supply boats, attracted by higher, more secure wages and better working conditions.

The end result, thirdly, was that fishing in the northeast of Scotland was becoming increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer skippers. Those who managed to stay in the industry built bigger, more efficient vessels that required greater start up capital and cost more to run. As boats grew in size the real commercial fishing was done from Fraserburgh and Peterhead – the tiny Gamrie harbour could still support small in-shore creel boats (mainly the preserve of retired, ‘hobby’ fisherman) but certainly not the trawlers that for many years now had dominated the industry. The demographic implications were obvious: young (economically productive) Gamrics tended to move to where the work was, increasingly drawing the few church going families with young children away from the kirks and halls and toward the more lively charismatic and Pentecostal churches (such as the AoG in Fraserburgh, which to this day has a large, young and very wealthy congregation). To the extent that the regulation, competition and concentration of the fishing industry in the northeast of Scotland comes together to exert its own pressures, the suggestion that Gamrie (if not Fraserburgh and Peterhead) might be facing ‘the last of the last days’ industrially seems not so much doomsday pessimism as economic realism.

What about economic prosperity?

One possible contradiction rests in the simple fact that Gamrie, as a fishing village, has experienced considerable economic prosperity ever since the boom in the industry in the 1960s and 1970s. With this first wave of money came widespread car ownership and geographical mobility which in turn brought about the early stages of social transformation. What was once a highly religious, relatively close-knit (and closed) community became more open to the influences of migration, tourism and secularism (a process also occurring nationally. See Brown 2001). Television in particular was said to increasingly take precedence over attendance at Sunday worship in this new modern era, especially in households with children and teenagers. Churches previously filled to bursting with people once eager to hear ‘an old fashioned [fire and brimstone] gospel message’ seemed increasingly out of touch with the newer ideals of individualism and consumerism (see also Bruce 2001, 2002 on these national trends).

Many people (both fishermen and others) told me again and again – some with pride, some with horror – that Gamrie had, as a result of this past boom, more millionaires per head of population than anywhere else in Scotland. And at times it wasn't hard to believe. The 'fisher mansions' at the top of the brae were custom built, commissioned by very wealthy skippers, seemingly with the aim of affording maximum comfort when on shore for short spells before heading back out to sea. Luxury furnishings inside and powerful cars outside, as well as regular foreign holidays (summer and winter) signalled to others that these households were doing well for themselves despite the squeeze on the northeast fisheries. It was also interesting to note how these bigger properties, built on more spacious plots of land, seemed to mirror some of the morally dubious socio-spatial characteristics that my fisher informants attributed to their (now not so distant) farming neighbours. Perhaps then, we are not seeing the last days of the fishing, but the last of the 'old days' of fishing so synonymous with poverty and close-knit community?

Where young children with flash mobile phones and designer clothes and teenagers with brand new cars well before they passed their tests were not uncommon, it is important to note that some skippers had huge debts, tied not only to the mortgages on their boats, but also to their modern lifestyles of conspicuous consumption. Yet there were others, who, working on huge pelagic boats capable of catching £1 million of herring per trawl, were paid astronomically high wages. Deck hands no more than 18 years old were rumoured to be earning upwards of £80,000 for working six to eight weeks a year. With few if any family commitments, and a taboo on working a second job for the other ten months of the year¹⁷, some of these wealthy young men were said to turn to fast cars or drugs – and sometimes both – in an attempt to spend their wages. Stories circulated through the channels of gossip and local newspapers of the disastrous (social and spiritual) consequences of the reckless actions of these immature youths unable to handle their new found wealth. Old people shook their heads at seeing the kinds of things that they imagined only happened in big cities (drug dealing, joy riding) actually occurring in their 'own village' among their 'own folk'.

¹⁷ Several of my informants told me that pelagic fishermen would immediately lose their berth if they were found to be working a second job because the skippers they worked for demanded the crew be available at all times.

It is important to realise, however, that such prosperity was only possible because of the concentration of the fishing into the hands of an ever shrinking list of skippers, many of whom were from Gamrie. Thus, while some crews went out of business, those resilient (or ‘lucky’, or ‘blessed’?) enough to remain in the industry did very well for themselves. So why were Gamrie’s Kirks and halls struggling to keep their doors open if many Gamrie fishermen continued to do well? The answer is straightforward – those currently making big money in the fishing were either unconnected to any fellowship (‘too busy’, I was told by their critics, ‘to have any time for God’) or were attending only on a nominal basis but not ‘tithing’ their earnings. ‘Money is their God’ my elderly friends would say, as if giving out a stern warning to those, such as myself, who appeared willing to listen.

The existence or otherwise of prosperity among Gamrie’s skippers, then, was certainly not what was being debated. It was rather the effects of this new found (and uniquely modern) wealth. My elderly Christian friends were largely in agreement on this point: ‘prosperity has been the death of religion in this village’ they would answer whenever I asked how the village had changed in their lifetime; ‘they have so much money that they have lost sight of their need of God’. Further still, trawling for prawns had become much safer – with the advent of steel hulls came more sheltered ‘closed deck’ vessels, and later, ships equipped with collision avoidance computer systems. Equally, sonar technology made hunting for previously invisible shoals of fish more a subject of science than it did a matter of religion and superstition.

The logic held by so many of my older informants was essentially this: with closed decks and full wallets (neither of which they themselves experienced), the God of protection and provision was no longer the priority He once was in days gone by. To complicate things further, where the economic rewards of trawling were on the rise, so too were the overheads. By the 1980s, with considerable rises in the cost of both boats and diesel, the size of mortgages fishermen had to secure to start or expand a business grew exponentially. Today, an average sized trawler (fig. 21) costs around £2 million, with much larger pelagic boats (fig. 22) costing £25 million. Such massive financial outlays meant that the traditional 6 day week at sea – crucially leaving Sunday (‘the Lord’s Day’) free for worship – was largely abandoned in favour of much more fuel efficient trips that

lasted anywhere from two to eight weeks. With more time at sea (and less time in church) profits from catches continued to overtake expenditure and the lifestyles of fisherman rose accordingly.



Fig. 21: Genesis BF. 505. An average size trawler (24m approx) (Simple Machines 2008)



Fig. 22: Chris Andra FR. 228. A large pelagic trawler (70m approx) (Simple Machines 2008)

Prosperity not only brought the development of ever more efficient trawling technologies, but it also brought radio and television, tagged, as an informant of mine reminisced, with the advertising slogan ‘bringing the world into your home’. It was the arrival of modern ‘worldliness’ (with all its associated ungodliness) that my elderly Christian friends mourned over most bitterly. Not only was the world brought to Gamrics, but through, among other things, widespread car ownership, *Gamrics were brought into the world*.

In the 1990s, a property boom corresponded with the boom in the fishing industry causing small traditional ‘fisher cottages’ in Gamrie’s Seatown to be sold (at enormous profit) to wealthy English urbanites who sought rural summer retreats. With the Seatown desolate for ten months of the year, newly prosperous skippers built ever bigger ‘fisher mansions’ at the top of the brae, consolidating the demographic change that had already occurred at the bottom of the brae with the arrival of ‘English incomers’ (who now make up 11% of the resident population) (SCROL 2001). These new ‘white settlers’ (Jedrej and Nuttal 1995) – this ‘village of the damned’ – brought with them new modern, secular ideals and ways of life. Sunday work, non-church attendance and public consumption of alcohol became increasingly the norm, with ‘traditional values’ becoming little more than a distant memory within two generations.

With the local fishing industry seemingly an industry of extremes, offering either bankruptcy or enormous wealth, with very little in-between (simply by virtue of the size of mortgages required to run a trawling business) the future economic possibilities do not bode well for the religion of Gamrie. Indeed, where ‘the love of money’ is no longer held to be ‘the root of all evil’, a Goldilocks-type resolution – with neither too much money to turn people off their ‘need of God’, nor too little, choking the supply of cash needed to remain solvent – seems unlikely. Such was the pinch of economy.

Pinch Two: Demography

The village’s first census in 1841 recorded 90 dwellings and a population of 420, which had grown to 170 dwellings and 1200 people by 1901 (genuki.org.uk 2011). The resident population of Gamrie, according to the 2001 Scottish Census (SCROL 2001), is 733

(comprising 304 households), ethnically white, and aging¹⁸. Of those aged 16 and over, 55% are married (national average 44%), 5% are divorced (national average: 7%), only 22% have never been married (national average 31%) and just 3% cohabit (national average: 7%) (SCROL 2001).

Yet local demographics, as with the economy, are also changing. Many people in their twenties are migrating south to Aberdeen or elsewhere in search of work, and more boys in their teens are choosing to train for entry into the oil industry rather than the fishing. Another strong indicator of out-migration is the falling roll at Bracoden Primary School, which serves Gamrie and the surrounding countryside. There are currently only 61 pupils enrolled and 3 teachers (including the head teacher) on staff. While part of this decline is to be explained by a lower birth rate, my landlady (herself a teacher at Bracoden during my fieldwork) explained the shrinking of the roll mainly in terms of families moving away from the village to the bigger centres of Banff and Aberdeen.

In-migration, as already mentioned, is a relatively new and important trend. With 11% of the population being ‘English incomers’ who either come to buy retirement homes or arrived with young families in search of a better quality of life away from the big urban centres, older Gamrics complained to me how the close community of days gone by had given way to a sense of social estrangement and decline. Such trends were said to have corresponded with a growth in economic inequality, a rise in petty crime and vandalism and the spread of heroin addiction among young deckhands with comparatively high disposable incomes. Importantly, discussing ‘how times have changed’ was not simply the preserve of the elderly – those in their 30s and 40s who I interviewed also spoke of dramatic shifts in the ‘spiritual’, social and industrial configuration of the area.

Crucially, the Christians of Gamrie were growing old and they knew it. Many of my informants were elderly people who had long since retired and it was these older folk who made up the majority of the congregations I spent so much time with during fieldwork. What was striking was that the sons and daughters of these older people,

¹⁸ The age profile of Gamrie is not that of a straightforwardly ageing population, however, with roughly 2% more people aged ‘under 16’ than the national average of 19% (SCROL 2001).

themselves in their thirties and forties, were noticeably absent from church. This meant (assuming religious ‘revival’ did not break out among the young) that several of the fellowships in the village were on the brink of extinction, a fact of which my friends were very much aware.

The Braehead Hall was a classic example of this, with a congregation of about twelve, the youngest of whom was in her mid 60s, the majority being in their 70s and 80s. I regularly attended a Bible study meeting at Braehead and remember one particular meeting when the agedness of those gathered was on display for all to see. There were only seven of us there that evening; several of the others were not well enough to come out on a cold October night such as it was. George (a man in his seventies), slowly pulled a chair round to face where he sat, placed a cushion on the seat and lifted his right leg up to ease the chronic aching that plagued him constantly. Steven (who looked to be in his late sixties), sat beside me, wheezing – ‘I’m affa breathless tonight Joe’ he told me with a pained expression, holding a hand to his mouth. Helen told us all that she had been struggling this week with headaches and dizziness. Billy – the de facto leader of the fellowship – sat stiffly in his chair not mentioning the fact that he had a serious heart condition that meant he was regularly in and out of hospital with severe chest pains. Leonard was the last to join the circle that night, but within minutes his entire body was shaking with a horrendous wracking cough and was eventually taken home. The meeting was abandoned after only a few prayers because of the lack of able bodied people felt to be needed to sustain a Bible study. ‘You have to laugh!’ Betty chuckled, commenting on our disastrous attempt at holding a meeting that night. ‘That’s right’ Helen said with a more sombre tone ‘otherwise you’d cry’¹⁹.

The pinch of demography, however, did not just concern the presence of old age within the churches, but also the absence of youth. Braehead’s congregation, like those of the other fellowships in the village, was mostly made up of grandparents. The middle aged, by and large, did maintain some limited church connection by attending special ‘one-off’

¹⁹ It is interesting to note here how gender and age come together to compound this demographic pressure: while much of the physical infirmity at Braehead and other fellowships was experienced by men, women were still not permitted to take part in the leadership of services. Thus, where no male was fit to lead, the service was simply abandoned rather than have a female lead.

meetings but were generally much less committed to public worship than their parents. As mentioned above, the pressures of modern fishing was an often given explanation (or ‘excuse’ depending on who was doing the talking); bigger boats meant bigger mortgages which meant longer trips to sea to meet repayments, and this meant more time away from the village. Weekends at home were precious and skippers often chose family over church commitments. Crucially, this was said to have a profound impact upon their own children; where fathers did not go to church, mothers would often stay home as well, leaving teenagers with little reason or encouragement to go to church or Bible class. Boys in their mid to late teens were often out on the boats with their fathers in any case, and girls often chose to stay at home with their mothers.

In this sense, non-attendance did not seem to emerge from any atheistic conviction (indeed, it was not uncommon for parents who did not themselves attend church to send their young children to Sunday school simply as a matter of free childcare) but rather out of pragmatism and lack of interest. The onus, as a result, was firmly placed back on the grandparents to do the real work of ‘household evangelism’. What was interesting to note however, was that the recipients of these spiritual efforts were not so much their own (now grown up) children, but rather their grandchildren. Heartbroken women who prayed for their families through tears prayed mainly for their grandchildren who were pitied for having no strong example of Christian leadership in the home.

Crucially, the demographics of this evangelism were by no means incidental. Elderly parents who were themselves committed Christians had all but given up on their children ‘converting’; those in their middle age were seen as having made their decision to ‘reject Christ’ despite having been ‘raised under the influence of the gospel’. The efforts of my elderly Christian informants had shifted focus onto their grandchildren who were, after all, ‘the future of the church’. Yet, as we shall see with the pinch of eschatology, the pinch of demography made it abundantly clear that time was running out.

Billy and Betty, George and Helen – these older Christians could not expect to be on this earth for much longer; they were growing old and were ‘heaven bound’. Yet the time they had left was all the time that there was to secure the continued future of the church;

if their grandchildren did not convert, the game was up, so to speak, and the local religion would die. Parents – too busy with making money at sea or running the household – could not be relied upon to ‘send forth the Gospel call’ to the next generation, so it fell to the grandparents, through the sacrifice of their preaching, of their prayers and of their ‘daily life of witness’, to make the most of this last chance. Yet as their bodies aged and failed, so too did their hopes of living to see the spiritual revival they so anxiously desired to be ‘poured out upon the land’. If nothing changed, and changed fast, the only foreseeable path was numerical decline followed by extinction; ‘There’s only old ones left now Joe. Soon we’ll have to close the door for good’ one man said as he locked up the hall after a prayer meeting. Such was the pinch of demography.

What about other migration trends?

Out-migration, as I have discussed already, is something of a problem for the churches of Gamrie. Some young families have left the village to live in the larger towns of Banff and Fraserburgh. Others, while not moving residence to these places, have chosen to worship there rather than attending any of the churches or halls in the village. Banff has a fairly large charismatic church that is able to attract young families with a contemporary ‘worship band’ and an emphasis on youth and children’s work. Likewise, Fraserburgh is home to several lively Pentecostal churches that are both personnel and cash rich. These churches seem to be bucking the wider regional and national trend towards decline in church attendance (see Brierley 2000, Bruce 2001, Hillis 2002, Voas 2006), a feature that is in some measure explained by the fact that these congregations are growing (in part) due to their ability to attract members away from other struggling churches, such as those in Gamrie. To add a further layer of complication to the situation, it is interesting to note that, since having completed my fieldwork in January of 2010, the charismatic church in Banff has forged formal ties to Gamrie’s Braehead fellowship (fig. 7), and busses in young Christians each Sunday night to hold a contemporary ‘worship celebration’ in an attempt to bring about spiritual growth and revival, particularly among Gamrie’s ‘lost’ teenagers.

Other complications regarding in-migration also arise. While many of the ‘incomers’ to the village have no church connection at all, others do. In general, those not born and brought up in the village, if they were to go to any place of worship in Gamrie, would choose to go to the Kirk, it being the largest and most ‘mainline’ of the denominations represented. Several of my Christian informants fell into this category and some had become highly involved in the life and work of the church. The Kirk Sunday school, as well as the (interdenominational) ‘Crusaders’ after school club also attracted several children from incomer families, even where their parents were not themselves attending any place of worship.

The FPCU offered a slightly different slant on the process of in-migration insofar as several of the key members of that church were themselves Northern Irish farmers who had sold their land in Ulster and bought much larger farms in Aberdeenshire where land was cheaper. These families represented a ‘gathered’ section of this congregation – far from being local, some undertook a sixty mile round trip to attend what, at times, local Gamrics said felt like a church run by and for Northern Irish ex-pats²⁰. Yet there were others – more strictly local – who came into Gamrie for Sunday worship from other towns. Members of various Brethren groupings whose own local halls had been forced to close because of numerical decline came from their neighbouring towns and villages into Gamrie each Sunday for worship. Others came to Gamrie not because their own Brethren meeting had closed, but because they had fallen out with those who ran the hall nearest to their home. All this is to say, simply, that patterns of church attendance were neither bounded nor stable. While some left Gamrie every Sunday to worship outside the village, others came in, and still others did both, attending one church for a period of months (or even years), then perhaps moving elsewhere – sometimes nearer, sometimes further away – in search of a warmer welcome, a freer (or more conservative) doctrinal outlook, a different style of worship, or simply a change of scene. When it came to the churches of Gamrie and the surrounding region, it seemed that the reasons for coming – as well as the reasons for going – were just as various as the people who held them.

²⁰ A situation that might well change as a result of the departure of the minister in February of 2010.

Pinch Three: Eschatology

In the year 1145, Halley's Comet passed over Belgrade, with its gaseous tail burning bright in the night sky. Its cosmic light was so alarming, that, according to the Italian Renaissance historian Bartolomeo Platina, Pope Calixtus III ordered that special prayers be said for the city to avert the 'grievous pestilence' that would surely follow this onslaught of 'the wrath of God' (Emerson 1960). Calixtus' decree had its intended effect and Belgrade stood firm. About 200 years later, however, God's anger was rekindled against Europe, again in the form of Halley's comet. Yet on this occasion the prayers of the faithful did not meet with mercy but with an eruption of vengeful sickness so fierce that it struck down a third of the continent by 1350, or as many as one hundred million souls. This bubonic plague – this blackest of deaths – was seen by many as The Almighty enacting judgement upon the whole earth (ibid.), and in a way that could only but remind these Medieval Christians of the fate of Old Testament Egypt at the hands of Moses. By 1910, over half a millennium later, with the reappearance of the comet over Europe, the French astronomer Camille Flammarion predicted (albeit with 'scientific' intent) that Halley would finally bring about *le fin du monde* as a result of a highly poisonous gas that was said to be emanating from this increasingly infamous astral body. His prophecy – with hindsight, a little hasty – led to the panic buying of gas masks, as well as 'anti-comet pills' and 'anti-comet umbrellas' (Etter et al. 1985) as fear took hold and people waited for either deliverance or death. Neither, in the end, arrived.

Many of my informants constantly sought to remind me that we were all living in 'the last of the last days' by which they meant that Christ would return (literally) 'any day now' to judge the world with fire from heaven. But what do the Christians of Gamrie have in common with Pope Calixtus III, the Black Death and anti-comet umbrellas? What they share, it seems, is a great concern with looking for 'signs of the times', that is, signs that the end of the world is at hand. The Bible, of course, was the first place my informants looked to to find these precursory warnings, and it was to the 'prophetic scriptures' of the Books of Daniel and Revelation that they normally turned. But to borrow a phrase from Geertz (2000: 168), if these texts were the menu, what my friends really wanted was a meal. And yet, in order to have this hunger satisfied, the secular

world of Scotland described earlier (see particularly Brierley 2000, Bruce 2001, 2002 and Voas 2006) compelled Gamrics to look not to astronomy but to modernity for evidence of the nearness of the ‘last days’; it was politics, as opposed to comets and plagues, that provided the best proverbial meat of the imminent apocalypse.

It is this belief – that humanity is on the cusp of Armageddon – that forms the core of the final ‘pinch’, and asks the question, how is everyday life to be lived in the present when any (and all) sense of the near future (see Guyer 2007) is either abandoned or endlessly qualified with phrases such as ‘if the Lord tarry’ or ‘assuming Jesus hasn’t come back yet’? How does this unceasing anticipation of deliverance from imminent annihilation frame the way in which wider social, demographic and population changes are viewed? One partial answer to some of these questions stems from the way in which these eschatological beliefs promote enormously urgent and hugely pressurised efforts of evangelism: because time is said to be so critically short (‘we are’, I was reminded time and again, ‘living in the *last* of the *last* days’), the salvific stakes could not be higher. The pressure my Christian friends felt to ‘witness’ to ‘the need to be born again’ was enormous; the ‘day of grace’ (the time that remains *before* Christ’s return in judgement, up to which salvation can still be received) was running perilously short and could be cut off in an instant, leaving, so I was told, millions if not billions of souls to (eternally) die in their sins.

Crucially, these were not the souls of some imagined and far off ‘heathen’, but were rather the painfully close and personally precious souls of ‘unconverted loved ones’; husbands and wives who ‘had not yet made a decision for Christ’; sons and daughters, now in their middle age, who ‘showed no interest in the gospel’; grandchildren, who ‘were far, far away from the Kingdom’. It is important to realise that, from the perspective of the Christians of Gamrie, although they yearned for the return of the Christ who would usher them into heaven, this return was double-edged insofar as it also marked the beginning of an eternal separation from unsaved family members. As far as my informants were concerned, time was desperately short and there was so much work to be done – so many people urgently needed to be ‘reached with the good news of the gospel’.

Importantly, it was not just the shortness of time that made the stakes high; the ‘pinch’ of eschatology was also sharply felt because of the consequences of the decision that had to be made. Casually neglecting to respond to ‘the call to be saved’ amounted to the same thing as outright rejection – what was referred to in sermons as ‘a lost eternity in hell’. ‘There is no sitting on the fence!!’ was the message I heard from dozens of gospel preachings in all six churches; ‘You either accept Christ as your Saviour or you reject Him!’ Acceptance meant that those issuing ‘the call to be saved’ could be assured of ‘enjoying an eternity of fellowship’ with those who had responded positively in this way. Rejection meant eternal material separation from those husbands and daughters and grandchildren who had never ‘been born again’. Salvation, then, was seen as a personal event wrought in the heart of the individual, but one that was then made known to others (and thus indexed as ‘real’ salvation) through ‘giving testimony’ and ‘bearing witness’²¹.

The weight of sorrow that this lived experience put on elderly Christians whose families were not ‘saved’ was heartbreaking to witness. I can remember attending a weekly prayer meeting at one particular church which was, like all the other meetings, mainly made up of folk in their 60s, 70s and 80s. One woman, whenever it came to the time of open congregational prayer, would plead with God to save her grandchildren. Her words expressed a deep sense of helplessness; she had shared the gospel to no avail; their hearts were ‘stubborn and hard’; they had, up to now, ‘rejected Christ’. Her prayers were, almost without fail, cut short when stifled tears gave way to speechless weeping, leaving other congregants to step in and take up the same theme on behalf of their own ‘unsaved’ love ones. These were tears borne out of the tension between the instantaneous and the unending; between making a decision that took immediate effect and one that would also have permanent consequences; ‘Time is running out! Accept Christ as your Saviour *tonight* and spend eternity with Him in heaven *tomorrow*!’ was the refrain of many a preacher. Such was the pinch of eschatology.

²¹ See Chapters IV and V for more detail on the linguistic and material nature of salvation as indexed through ‘testimony’ and ‘witness’.

What about when prophecy fails?

Practically (and prophetically) speaking, it has been ‘the last of the last days’ in Gamrie for decades. The Second Coming of Christ has been ‘utterly imminent’ since the Brethren arrived in the village in the 1850s, spreading their millennial vision through street preaching and home Bible study. Yet even a moderate amount of historicism allows one to see that the actual application of ‘end times’ Biblical prophecy to concrete happenings ‘in the world’ is actually rather fickle. The title ‘anti-Christ’ is an informative example here.

For a great number of years after the Scottish Reformation of 1560, many of those who broke with Rome espoused that the Roman Catholic Church in general, and the Pope in particular, was the anti-Christ. That is to say the Papacy was held to be the prophetic fulfilment of ‘The Beast’ spoken of in the Book of Revelation; a puppet of the Devil designed to lead people into blasphemous worship directed towards a demonic and counterfeit saviour (Friend 2010, Lake 2002, Norton 2009). There was, for some time, broad consensus among the generations of followers of Luther, Calvin and Knox in this regard, with the Papacy enjoying a spell of about 400 years in the Protestant eschatological limelight – with some in Gamrie still subscribing to this view today.

The next major figure to take the name ‘anti-Christ’, Charles Darwin, did so out of an intellectual creativity first made possible as a result of the Enlightenment, causing his theory of evolution to be dubbed ‘the religion of the antichrist’. Then, with the national and political upheavals of the twentieth century and the arrival of modernity, Darwin’s unholy honour was lost during the war years to Nazism, which, because of its determined efforts to destroy the Jewish peoples of the world, was seen by many Christian Zionists (and not a few other Protestants) as the anti-Christ. Yet after the Second World War and the rise of the USSR, because of its ideological zeal and unfavourable treatment of Christianity, communism replaced Nazism as the new and certain face of the anti-Christ. The EU (then the Common Market) was next to take the stand as the latest uncontested anti-Christ with its unification of economic markets and a legal and bureaucratic structure centralised in Brussels. And then September 11th rocked the global political order,

placing Islam, in the minds of many ‘fundamental’ (and some evangelical) Protestants, as the clear and present manifestation of the anti-Christ.

With the arrival of each new ‘evil empire’, the old assertions that such-and-such was, without doubt, *the* anti-Christ were forgotten, paving the way for the demonisation of a new institution or previously ignored religion or individual as the Devil incarnate. My point is this: the interpretation of Biblical prophecy was (and is) always sufficiently vague to allow for a highly general – and thus highly malleable – ‘real world’ application. Think here then how we have been discussing ‘the last of the last days’; no date or time is given, no specific disprovable threshold is offered; my informants told me that we were living through the ‘end times’, and that was more than was sufficient. ‘Do you think we are living in the last days?’ I would ask my elderly Christian friends. ‘Of course we are!’ came one particularly insightful response ‘but the question is: are we living through the *last* of the last days? I think we most definitely are. *Most definitely*’. But what happens when prophecy fails, to borrow from Festinger’s (1956) famous study of an end of the world UFO cult? The obvious answer is that, in the context of Gamrie, it simply never does. The indefinite is always offered in place of the definite and, as a result, the general theme of future predictions – that we are living through the end times – triumphs over the specific details of how the Papacy or the EU or Islam fits into the picture (see here Tumminia 2005). In this sense, it’s not really the eschatological answer that matters, but rather the actual act of reasserting the need to ask the question: are we living through the last of the last days? – a question, crucially, that, in the religious context of Gamrie that I was operating in, can only really ever be answered ‘*Of course we are!*’

The Three Way Precipice

In what I have argued for so far I have tried to show how the economic, social and religious situation in Gamrie is far from stable by describing how a group of mostly elderly committed Christians living in the village, themselves on the verge of death, are teetering on the edge of a three way precipice.

First, Gamrics were facing ‘the last of the last days’ economically. Regulation, competition and concentration were squeezing skippers’ profits and threatening the long term viability of the industry that had birthed Gamrie as a village. Money lost to Fraserburgh through migration of young fishermen and their families meant money lost in tithing to Gamrie’s churches. Where other religious resources, particularly preachers, flowed out of the village and into the bigger centres of fishing in the northeast, the lack of a centrally funded denomination was felt more keenly, causing some to affirm that the Christians of Gamrie were ‘living in a day of small things’, a fact that seemed just as true economically as it did spiritually and demographically.

Second, Gamrics were facing ‘the last of the last days’ demographically. Those in their thirties to middle age were largely absent from church, being too busy making money at sea or running a household to go to church. Their children – those in their teens and early twenties – were not keen to go either. This just left those of primary school age – too young to put up any real resistance – to be sent off to Sunday school and taken to church by their grandparents. The aim, of course, was conversion – ‘that they would come to have a saving relationship with the Lord while they are still young’. It was this and this alone (‘assuming Jesus didn’t come back’) that offered the church some hope of a demographic future by snatching it from otherwise certain extinction.

Third and finally, the Christians of Gamrie were facing ‘the last of the last days’ spiritually; the impending apocalypse meant that very soon all those born-again believers in the village would be ‘raptured’ into heaven with those ‘left behind’ suffering through the trials of the Tribulation (see LaHaye 1996) only then to ‘enter into a lost eternity’. The only solution, as far as my elderly Christian informants were concerned, was praying for a religious revival where the Holy Spirit would ‘move in power’ leading many to ‘saving faith in Jesus’. Time was rapidly running out – and if their prayers were not answered, the result would be spiritual disaster.

As the Christians of Gamrie looked into the future, all they could see was eschatological deliverance or economic and social destruction. The likelihood of ‘going out with a bang’ seemed slim; these ‘last of the last days’, being so small, promised only a whimper, that

is, ‘assuming...’ – as the endlessly sincere qualification to all future predictions went – ‘...that Jesus didn’t come back’. ‘It’s in the Lord’s hands’ one man told me when I asked him what he thought the years ahead held for Gamrie; ‘God is still on the throne – we just have to wait on Him’. It is to the nature of this ‘waiting time’ – defined locally not by passive inaction but by the urgent activity of preaching, ‘giving testimony’ and evangelism – that I now want to turn to in the second part of this thesis. Let us start with the practice of preaching.

Part II: *Words*

Chapter III

Preaching

This chapter and the two that follow it are about the enchanting power of words. Insofar as these chapters are also about the speaking and hearing of words, they also concern the enchanting power of language – and perhaps none more so than this chapter on preaching. But before we move to consider local tropes of preaching in detail, let us first turn to the more general local trope of worship as sacrifice.

Introduction

Many times I heard my informants describe their Christian lives as both a life of worship and a life of sacrifice – indeed, many spoke of how they experienced worship as a kind of sacrifice. But what does a life of sacrifice look like and how is it related to worship? The answer, I want to argue in this chapter, is only found by paying close attention to the actual linguistic content (Keller 2005, 2006; Robbins 2003, 2006) of ritual acts of worship by relating them to a locally salient ideal that was said, normatively, to characterise those acts of worship.

What I want to argue is that this view of religious worship as sacrifice was underpinned by a local belief that the Christian person was formed from two distinct parts – the ‘flesh’ and the ‘spirit’. The flesh referred locally to various ‘natural’ (and thus ‘fallen’) corporeal ‘lusts’ for food (especially meat), dancing, sex, tobacco, alcohol and violence, as well as various other forms of bodily stimulation and gratification. Mary showed me her mother’s ‘Pledge Certificate’ which solemnised her vow never to drink alcohol, a vow which Mary herself had taken. Noel spoke to me of his strict disapproval of dancing, even at weddings. Iain spoke of his ongoing struggle against his smoking habit, something which he saw as a God-dishonouring bodily addiction that he needed to conquer ‘in the power of Jesus’ Name’. The spirit, rather than naturally desiring the things of the body, supernaturally desired the things of God – typified locally as prayer, hymn singing, Christian fellowship, and of course, the reading and exposition of ‘The

Word'. It was explained to me that 'non-Christians' were entirely guided by the 'lusts' of the flesh, whereas Christians, although still in possession of the 'fallen nature' of the flesh, sought to be guided by the yearnings of the spirit. Iain's struggle with his nicotine addiction was a battle he could always hope to win, no matter how many setbacks he experienced, because, unlike his non-Christian friends, his 'flesh' (and its desires) were slowly being transformed as he prayed, read the Bible, and heard 'The Word' preached.

To the extent, then, that my Christian informants spoke frequently to me about this oppositional tension that existed between the 'spirit' and the 'flesh', and to the extent also that spirit and flesh can be said to map onto sociological notions of the 'body' and the 'self' (Goffman 1958; Also Foucault 1977a, 1977b) my argument in this chapter will be that acts of worship (and specifically sermonising) offered my informants a mediating category with which these two modes of personhood could be traversed. Importantly, worship should not be seen as an exclusively emic category but also as a category capable of mediating between 'our' etic notions of body and self. I want to suggest, then, that both of these mediations can be seen to occur through a shared 'language of perspicuous contrast' (Taylor 1985: 125) made possible by deploying theological and anthropological notions of sacrifice in tandem. In order for this to make sense, some basic questions need answering first, namely: '*what* was being sacrificed?', '*how* was it being sacrificed?', and '*with what outcome?*' Let me take each in turn.

First, *what* was being sacrificed? The local answer, as might be expected given our context of conservative Scottish Protestantism, was the 'lusts of the flesh'. Such corporeal pleasures were condemned from Gamrie's pulpits and prayer halls for their demanding immediate and repeated physical gratification regardless of the impact upon the credibility of one's 'testimony'. It was the 'free and easy' 'indulgence' of bodily desire – the 'sins of the flesh' as my informants frequently called them – that were to be sacrificed. Indeed, these were the 'sinful lusts' that so many of my older Christian informants imagined would eventually cast their grandchildren into hell. Such was the necessity of the sacrifice.

Second, *how* was it being sacrificed? While this answer is more complex, it still lies within local understandings of the duality of Christian personhood – of the flesh and the spirit. Simply put, sacrificing the flesh was said by local Christians to involve the ‘starving’ of the sinful desires of the body and the ‘feeding’ of the life of the spirit. The sacrificial life of Christian worship, then, like all ‘traditional’ forms of sacrifice, involved a kind of killing – the killing of the flesh. This is evidenced by the fact that my closest informants who spoke to me about personal struggles in their ‘walk of faith’ portrayed their ‘life of worship’ as an ‘ongoing battle with the flesh’, seen in Iain’s fight against smoking or in Alexander’s vowing to never drink or swear. The needful task of the Christian was described to me by these friends as explicitly involving a ‘putting to death’ of the flesh: ‘Be busy killing *sin* or sin will be busy killing *you*!’

This sacrificial ‘killing’ of the flesh and its sinful desires was not undertaken literally, but, as mentioned above, by a kind of figurative ‘starving’ and ‘feeding’. The flesh was ‘starved’ (‘put to death’) through the strict denial of – and control over – corporeal desire through the normative expectation of teetotalism, celibacy outside marriage and prohibitions on smoking, foul language, violent behaviour and so on. But these abstentions were only part of the picture; there was also a more constructive method for ‘killing’ the flesh, namely ‘feeding’ the ‘life of the spirit’. Thus, being a ‘living sacrifice’ was said to mean living a life of reverent worship, that is, living a life that was characterised by a double self-sacrifice of destruction of the flesh and pursuit of the spirit. In view of local Gamrics emphasis on ‘feeding the spirit’, I want to draw some parallels between this folk-theological model of sacrifice and the model described by Robertson Smith (1972: 252, 255) and elaborated by Durkheim (2008: 251) which states that sacrifice necessitates, in some form or another, the eating of the sacred being²².

Thus, where Robertson Smith states that:

²² Importantly, my use of Robertson Smith (1972) does not equate to a strong commitment to the entirety of his theoretical project. In purposely restricting my use of his work to the relationship he posits between sacrifice and eating I am simply attempting to draw out some connections between anthropological understandings of religious sacrifice and those that emerged through local folk-theology.

Everywhere we find that sacrifice ordinarily involves a feast, and that a feast cannot be provided without a sacrifice [...] when men meet their god they feast and are glad together...

(Robertson Smith 1972: 255)

I want to suggest that a similar process of ingestion is at work in the sacrificial worship of reverence. Where the work of (totemic) sacrifice seeks to forge ‘fictive kinship’ (Carsten 1997) bonds between the worshipper and the divine through the sharing of food (Robertson Smith 1972. Also Durkheim 2008), I will argue that the sacrificial ‘killing’ of the flesh is in large part achieved through a (very Protestant) take on Robertson Smith’s ancient Semitic sacrificial feast (1972: 255). Where my informants constantly pressed upon me the necessity of ‘feasting upon the Word of God’, and where preaching, praying and reading the Bible were all seen as central aspects of ‘feeding’ the spiritual life of any Christian, my main theoretical claim here is that like so many methods of sacrifice, the sacrifice of the flesh itself requires a kind of eating, but – and this is where I significantly diverge from both Robertson Smith and Durkheim – it is not one that necessarily involves the literal imbibing of food through the mouth, but rather involves the figurative imbibing of words through the ear. Essentially, I will suggest that the ‘flesh’ that Iain and Mary and Noel and Alexander sacrificed through a life of reverence was *transformed* into words and then *re-embodied* (‘feasted upon’) through the key religious ritual of sermonising. It is this re-embodiment then – this eating of words through the ear – that can be seen as constituting, for my informants, the sacrificial meal of the speaking and hearing of sermons.

Third and finally, what was the *outcome* of such a sacrifice? The answer to this again lies with the duality of Christian personhood locally conceived. The most obvious outcome of the sacrifice was the ‘putting to death’ of the flesh – experienced through my informants’ (figuratively) violent destruction of the physical compulsion to gratify the desires of their bodies, seen in their (literal, material) abstention from those forms of life already mentioned above. The second outcome, connected to the first, was my informants strengthening of their ‘life in the spirit’ through the ‘feeding’ of spiritual desires to pray, sing hymns, share Christian fellowship, witness to the unsaved and, crucially, to read ‘The Word’ and hear it preached. Mortification of the body followed by sanctification of

the self followed by mortification of the body... a process that was locally imagined to occur until the commencement of ‘the hereafter’.

But what was the actual (‘this-worldly’) outcome of the dual process of ‘starving’ and ‘feeding’ in the lives of my friends? It will be my argument that the result was the receipt of a transformed body, that is, a body made not of flesh but of words. Crucially, I do not want to suggest that this body is essentially ‘metaphorical’ and thus ‘really’ yet another example of the supposed ‘pure transcendence’ of Christianity. No, rather I want to suggest that this body made of words is indicative of a new kind of logocentric immanence that no longer dichotomises flesh and spirit, but actually conflates them. The sacrificial outcome (the results of which are shot through the entire thesis) is both the immanence of transcendence and the transcendence of immanence.

Preaching in Context

God [is] sanctifying his people in every age through the preaching and the teaching of the Bible... Take seriously the preaching of the Word of God Sunday after Sunday in this place! Take it seriously because you are being prepared for heaven... through the teaching of the Word of God... This is a preparation for eternity... As you come to sit under the ministry of God’s Word, don’t reject that ministry. Take it on board and say “Lord, it’s not the minister who’s speaking to me here; it’s *you* who is speaking to me through your Word...” Act upon what is taught in the Word of God... Whatever God says to you in the preaching and teaching of the scriptures *do it* and be obedient to what God tells you!

It was the second week of May, a Sunday, and I was sitting in the Gamrie Kirk. It was my fourth church meeting of the day and the eighth of that week. The preacher spoke with a high pitched urgency as he pleaded with us to submit ourselves to the truth of God as it emanated from the pulpit – itself an impressive structure that towered a full ten feet over the congregation. But what does it mean to ‘take seriously the preaching of the Word of God’? Why is listening to a sermon ‘preparation for eternity’? And how is the experience of listening to what is said from the pulpit transformed by the view that it is not the minister who speaks but God? It is questions such as these that this section will address.

Having attended formal church services about seven times a week for 15 months – and having ‘sat under’ roughly 400 sermons during that time – it would be difficult to ignore preaching if only on the basis of its ubiquity within the spiritual lives of my informants. Thus, as a central religious ritual in public (and semi-private) worship, any account of life as a Christian in Gamrie would simply be incomplete without close attention given over to the oral and aural practice of sermonising²³. Yet, in addition to giving ethnographic attention to preaching because of its dominance over the ritual lives of my informants, I also think sermonising is worthy of theoretical examination on the basis that its content (Keller 2006; Robbins 2003), performativity (Tomlinson 2009) and embodied nature (Csordas 1994b; Hirshkind 2001) all speak not only to local experiences of worship, but also to the role of words and language within the Protestant tradition (Keane 2004, 2006).

It is important to note at the outset that there were different types of sermons, according, by and large, to the perceived spiritual condition of the (often imagined) target audience. Morning services by and large catered for the ‘saved’. At the churches (Kirk and FPCU) there was a sermon designed to teach and encourage believers. At the halls (OB, CB) there was a ‘Breaking of Bread’ (communion) service for those who were ‘in the meeting’ (born-again *members*) which would often have a ‘wee wordie’ (mini sermon) aimed at explaining afresh some aspect of the act of breaking bread. In the afternoon in the halls there would be either a ‘Bible reading’ (where certain key men would discuss a portion of scripture while the majority of men and all of the women would sit in silence and listen), or there would be a ‘ministry meeting’ – a preaching, like the morning service at the churches – designed to teach and encourage believers. Finally, at the end of the day (generally 6pm) gospel preachings (called the ‘glad tidings’²⁴ by the CB) would occur at every single place of worship throughout the village. These were aimed at the ‘lost’ and were the best attended services across most of the churches in the village because many ‘unsaved’ would maintain a church connection by going.

Yet preaching was by no means restricted to formal church settings. I heard sermons preached at informal ‘prayer meetings’ (held in folk’s houses as well as in church), on the

²³ NB: I use ‘sermonising’ and ‘preaching’ as interchangeable terms.

²⁴ Following the practice of local Christians, I use ‘the gospel’ and ‘the glad tidings’ interchangeably.

street, at youth clubs, during men's get-togethers, at old folks coffee mornings and played on CDs in living rooms. I even heard a sermon preached in a local fish market to celebrate the launching of a new boat. But with such variety comes the need for a definition. Tomlinson, who defines sermonising as 'a genre of ritual speech performance in which explicating Biblical texts is a central goal' (Tomlinson 2006: 129), provides a helpful starting point. Sermonising *is* a 'ritual speech performance' insofar as it is a kind of 'religious formalism' spoken in front of an audience²⁵ (Durkheim 2008: 35). Equally, 'explicating' via exegesis was central; 'I'm not reading *into* the Bible, I'm here to read *out of it!*' was a common way of rhetorically framing this aspect of sermonising. Yet, where formal public delivery of Biblical exegesis was deemed to be central, preaching was what it was because there was also an audience – a congregation of listeners. Sermonising was not only a 'ritual *speech* performance' (Tomlinson 2006: 129), but also closely bound up with the practice of *listening*; it was the ear, just as much as the tongue, that was involved in the preaching of the scriptures.

One last word of introduction: despite the plethora of different 'worship services' listed above, I want to consider the sermons that I 'sat under' during my fieldwork not as an endlessly diverse system of species and subspecies, but rather as reflecting a dual typology – that of (i) 'preaching' and (ii) 'teaching'. It is my assertion that these are two distinct practices that need to be explicated as such. While I am aware that this dualism is in danger of underemphasising both sameness (the sense that preaching really is something of a coherent whole) and difference (in so far as there are more than two 'types' of sermon), I believe its retention is justified in so far as the dual categories of 'preaching' and 'teaching' did exist 'on the ground' in order to cater for two distinct audiences. Thus, by examining each type in turn, I want to consider how they further indicate the existence of two different types of person – the saved and the unsaved.

²⁵ It is important to note here that, like many conservative Protestants, my informants would strongly object to the suggestion that their preaching was in any way to be described as a 'ritual', because of its local association with Roman Catholicism.

Preaching the gospel

It was a Sunday night in early October and I had been in the field for less than a month. Having gone to most of the other fellowships already, I decided to go along to my first CB gospel service. Bible in hand, I made my way along the Seatown in my suit with a note book stuffed inside the breast pocket and started looking for the lane through the fisher cottages that led to the hall. I eventually found a building with a sign advertising the ‘glad tidings’ and tried the door. It opened easily, but into a pitch black cellar full of old tools. I was obviously not in the right place despite the sign. Confused, I looked around about me and spied the words ‘meeting room’ stencilled in badly faded black lettering on a window of a large shed-like building opposite the house that displayed the sign. The door opened onto a tiny entrance way with two further closed doors. One door read ‘toilet’; the other, which was blank, I opened.

I was greeted by a smile from a tall and very slim man in a grey suit. He looked to be in his seventies. He shook my hand and after saying hello, the inevitable question came – ‘are you on holiday here?’ to which I attempted a response that detailed who I was, where I was lodging and what I was doing in the village. After a brief pause, the man nodded, welcomed me again and told me to take a seat, pointing to a specific seat in the back left hand corner of the hall. Before too long, one of the men (whom I will call Murdo) slowly rose to his feet, walked to the front and stood behind the lectern. He gave out a hymn number, and, after the singing, three readings and a short prayer, he began to preach:

...God, in his glad tidings tonight is the way of peace! It is a way unknown to Man naturally; it is unknown and unseen by Man! Man cannot walk in it! Why? Because Man walks by sight and knows nothing about the path of life! ... Men away from Him [Christ] are perishing sinners! Man is lost! Guilty! Born in sin! All have sinned! ... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners! We [the saved] have been redeemed by precious blood! ... Dear friends, does everyone in this room believe that God raised Jesus from the dead? Oh the price! The ransom price! ... Have you ever stopped to contemplate the glories of the Lord Jesus? If you do not know him this is your opportunity to find him tonight! Has everyone here bowed the knee to Jesus? ... We are living on the threshold of great events. The Lord is soon to come for his own. ... What an outlook the believer has, waiting for His return! *Now* is the accepted time [to be saved]: tomorrow might

be too late! This world is ripe for judgement! And how soon will it be? We do not know, but He could come tonight and it will be too late! ... May we know what it means to have Him as our personal saviour! May you accept Him tonight, for His namesake. Amen.

The ‘fundamental’ message of Christianity I heard over dozens of gospel preachings was this: human beings are born as enemies of God, are under the curse of Adam’s sin, are naturally ignorant of ‘the things of God’, and, because they cannot help but delight in evil, are bound for everlasting punishment in hell. But, roughly 2000 years ago, the Son of God came to earth, lived a perfect life and then sacrificed himself on the cross to ‘pay the price’ for the sins of humanity. As a result, anyone who has ‘come under the shelter of the blood’ by being ‘born again’ through ‘personal faith’ in Jesus has had their rightful punishment transferred onto Him and will escape the wrath of God that is soon to be poured out upon the world when Jesus comes back in judgement. These ‘born again’ believers would either go to heaven when they die, or, if they live to see the unfolding of ‘end times prophecy’ (as was assumed to be the case locally), they would vanish from the face of the earth having been ‘raptured’ into heaven. Those who ‘refuse to recognise their need of a saviour’, however, would either ‘die in their sins’ and enter a ‘lost eternity’ or, if alive at the point of the rapture, would suffer seven years of ‘tribulation’ on earth and then be cast eternally into hell. Such was the ‘seriousness’ of the gospel message; it was literally a matter of life and death, but with everlasting, not temporal, consequences. It was indeed, as the preacher told us, ‘a preparation for eternity’.

In view of the fact that a sermon is a linguistic performance (Tomlinson 2006), it seems important to note the way in which Murdo delivered his sermon. My liberal use of exclamation marks in the transcription is not an exaggeration of his oratorical style, but is meant to accurately convey the level of intensity with which he preached. And Murdo was no exception. All of the men I heard preach the gospel did so with extreme verbal (and bodily) intensity and almost all of them did so not by speaking but rather by yelling. Importantly, such delivery ran against normal conventions of speech – the elderly fishermen who did most of the preaching were not bold and brash by habit, but were usually shy and reserved in general conversation. It was this that made their preaching

style all the more striking – their sermons were marked with a sense of power, feeling and force, and, above all, with considerable volume. ‘*Thump it oot!!*’ would be the (only half joking) advice given to preachers on the evening they were due to ‘take the gospel’. Men’s faces often went puce as they shouted from their platform about the immediate imperative of being born again. ‘Men away from [Christ]... are perishing sinners! Man is lost! Guilty! Born in sin!’ Murdo roared at us from the front of the hall with the occasional fleck of spittle shooting out of his mouth and catching the light as it descended on those sitting in the front row. A preacher would take his Bible in his hand, waving it in the air to emphasise a point with particular authority, and, on occasion, might actually thump the cover with his fist as he ‘sent forth The Word’ with almost hysterical zeal.

Importantly, sermons were not straightforward monologues but were rather interactive in the sense that preachers also often fired (albeit rhetorical) questions at the congregation as a way of drawing them into the challenge of their rhetoric: ‘Dear friends, does everyone in this room believe that God raised Jesus from the dead? ... Have you ever stopped to contemplate the glories of the Lord Jesus?’ Such questions were also linked to an appeal: ‘May *we* know what it means to have Him as our personal saviour! May *you* accept Him tonight...’ By starting with the first person plural and ending with the second person singular, a preacher would seek to evoke both shared responsibility and direct confrontation. The ‘glad tidings’ were preached with intensity, then, because the stakes were incredibly high. ‘*There’s a heaven to be gained and a hell to be avoided!*’ was one pithy summary of the gospel that stuck in my mind. Add to this the fact that time was deemed to be incredibly short – ‘we are living on the threshold of great events... He could come tonight and it will be too late!’ – and we begin to see why the message that Murdo delivered was designed to sound like an utter emergency. Murdo, it seems, had good reason to shout at us from the front of the hall that evening. But why did Christians like Murdo preach the gospel in the first place?

At the danger of sounding trite, the reason for preaching the gospel was because there existed a category of persons called ‘the unsaved’ who urgently needed, before the end of the ‘day of grace’ to be ‘born again’ and thereby join the ranks of the ‘saved’. This is why Elsa, the woman I previously described as weeping to the point of speechlessness

when attempting to pray for the conversion of her grandchildren during a mid-week meeting at the FPCU, was not praying for their salvation in the abstract, but was rather praying specifically for the preaching of the gospel. Praying for their salvation, then, really meant praying for the preaching, that is, that ‘the gospel would be proclaimed with convicting and converting power’ – a phrase that Elsa and others used frequently. The gospel existed, in local terms, ‘to do a saving work’, and it was for the efficacy of this work, just as much as for the souls of her grandchildren, that she ‘prayed over’ with tears of anguished sincerity. Without this category of ‘unsaved’ persons, then, the preaching of the gospel would be surplus to requirement. Yet attention must be given not only to examining local categories of sermons, but also to the ways in which these categories are made intelligible by their religious content.

The content of the gospel mattered, then, because it was the gospel that was said to give sight to the blind. Friends of mine who shared with me their ‘testimony’, such as Jim, very often specifically referred to their ‘moment of conversion’ as coming during a sermon. Jim described to me how he was restored to ‘saving faith’ after hearing the text ‘Seek ye first the Kingdom of God’²⁶ preached about on three occasions in as many days. Mark, a friend who struggled with learning difficulties, spoke to me of how he was saved from abandoning his faith when he eventually learnt how to read when in his thirties. Reading the Bible for himself for the first time meant he could finally understand the preaching. His ‘hunger’ for ‘The Word’ grew and he sought to be spiritually ‘fed’.

David, another friend, used to attend worship services with me at a local nursing home for patients with severe dementia, and always left feeling dejected. ‘It’s just so depressing!’ he said ‘none of it’s going in – they don’t understand a word the preacher is saying!’ David later explained that if they were not saved before they had ‘lost their minds’ then ‘there was no hope for them now – how could there be? They canna understand and respond to the gospel’. These dementia sufferers could not be saved, then, because they could not hear and respond to the gospel. What Jim and Mark and David help us to see is that, when it comes to the preaching of the gospel, listening is just as important as speaking. Indeed, in order for preaching to foster the kind of salvific ‘hope’

²⁶ A reference to Matthew 6.33.

that David spoke about, the right kind of words and feelings were required to allow one's ears to be 'opened' and one's heart to 'respond'.

But what importance was accorded to the *eyes*? What kind of *sight* did preaching grant the sinner? Jim, Mark and many others described to me how hearing the gospel granted them sight of their sin, that is, it brought a sincere conviction to their heart that they were 'in need of a saviour'. Simply put, preaching brought sight which brought conviction which brought conversion. The gospel was preached, then, because there existed this category of 'the unsaved' who were blind and needed to receive 'spiritual' sight so that they would in turn be given 'conviction of sin' and, then, experience salvation via conversion. Thus, without the category of 'sinner' everything else collapses in on itself.

But does the preaching of the gospel lose its urgency (and perhaps even its intelligibility) when all those listening are 'saved'? My ethnographic data suggests it does not. More often than not, when attending High Street CB gospel preachings, the 'glad tidings' would be 'sent forth' despite the fact that there were only six or seven people present, all of whom were publicly recognised (through their participation in the breaking of bread) as fully committed Christians. Despite the spiritual security of the tiny congregation, the same intensely urgent message would be 'sent forth'. The burning imperative of becoming a 'born-again' Christian would be stated over and over again for the entire duration of the half hour sermon. The preacher would (not with any malice but with genuine love and sincerely) lambaste them all with promises of the imminent judgement of Christ if they did not accept him tonight as their personal saviour. Even assuming that this particular CB group was, at times, less than fully convinced that I myself was a 'true believer', these gospel preachings had been happening faithfully (in my absence) every Sunday night for years to these specific half a dozen or so Christians. So why preach the need to be 'born again' to 'born-again believers'?

The highly standardised style and totally inflexible format of these sermons is, I think, insightful. 'We just have to keep preaching the glad tidings' the preacher would often say to me, shaking my hand as we filed out the hall. But why this imperative? The answer, I believe, is rooted in the fact that the existence of the category of the 'unsaved' person

was held by my Christian informants to be of greater importance than the actual religious condition of the six souls who made up the sum total of the congregation. I remember one woman, apparently embarrassed by the tiny size of their meeting, who said to me on my arrival: 'Well Joseph, there aren't many of us, but we just go on – we have to be faithful'. She further explained that because the sign outside their hall stated that The Word of God would be preached every Lord's Day at 6pm, that it was their spiritual duty to do so regardless of who attended. 'We are always hopeful of visitors' another woman commented to me, and this despite the fact that I never saw a single visitor apart from myself during my fifteen month association with their hall.

The shift in thinking required by my friends at the High Street Hall was really rather profound. The imagined (potential) audience, that is, the conceptually present but physically absent category of the 'unsaved' was, for these informants, more real ('real' in the sense that it directed action in the world) than the audience sitting facing the preacher. It wasn't the 'soul state' of the congregation that mattered, but the brute existence – 'out there' in the world – of the category of the 'unsaved' that determined what and how and why these men preached. 'We just *have* to keep preaching the glad tidings' – not only because that was what it said on the sign outside, but because, as another of High Street's elderly female members said to me, 'the village is full of so many strangers and holiday makers these days – and probably none of them has heard the gospel'. Preaching was not only a moral imperative but received its imperativeness from the simple existence (but not necessarily the physical presence) of the category of 'the unsaved'.

Thus, the method of delivery (preaching) and the subject matter (the gospel), are, in a sense, the same thing, that is, content and action are one. Preaching is, by definition, preaching the gospel. Which is why the people who sat with me as part of the congregation that night were as happy to listen to Murdo yell the *same* gospel with the *same* intensity to themselves and five other committed Christians as they would be for him to preach to a hall of a thousand ardent heathens, with themselves merely sitting supportively at the back. Preaching was a 'categorical imperative' in two senses, that is, it was both an unconditional moral obligation and a product of the brute existence of the unsaved 'somewhere out there in the world'.

Yet for those who sat silently in the pews, preaching the gospel was also said to be an act of worship. ‘We always get an impression of Christ’ was another comment repeatedly offered to me by one elderly couple when leaving the hall after a gospel preaching. Where to ‘get an impression of Christ’ was described to me by these friends as ‘fellowshipping with Christ’, and, in so doing, ‘coming to know Him more’, my friends were not only worshipping God by simply ‘attending to the means of grace’ (i.e. by going to church to hear ‘The Word’ preached), but also by coming into the near presence of God. ‘You never get too old for the gospel!’ was a stock phrase often offered to me at the end of a sermon by whomever I was sitting beside, ‘it’s always the same but you can never hear it enough!’ Whenever I enquired after why Christians never grew tired of hearing the same message of the need for salvation, congregants would tell me that the gospel represented ‘the basics’ or ‘the foundation’ of the ‘diet’ of any ‘true believer’ – like the drinking of milk, it was held locally to be both a necessity and a joy for all. ‘You never grow out of it!’ was the summary of another ordinary congregant. Such was the enchanted experience of listening to preaching as an act of worship – characterised by both the immanence of personal ‘fellowship with Christ’ and the transcendence of being ‘transported to the Pearly Gates’.

I have argued that ‘*preaching* the gospel’ was defined by the existence of the category of the unsaved insofar as it was by hearing the gospel message (the call to ‘repent’, receive ‘faith in Jesus’ and thus be ‘born again’) that ‘sinners’ were imagined to experience salvation. I now want to argue that ‘*teaching* the Bible’ – what local people also referred to as ‘ministry’ – was held to be a fundamentally different kind of activity because it was itself defined by a different category of person, that is, ‘the saved’.

Teaching the Bible

There is only one piece of furniture in the most holy place. It’s important ... This is divine revelation. There is the ark and the mercy seat. The mercy seat was made of pure gold. ... The Ark speaks primarily of the Lord Jesus Christ... He’s the God of heaven and he must have the pre-eminence... The Tabernacle was a place where God might dwell, so it was fundamental to the worship of the

Israelite... and Christ is fundamental to our worship. The shittim wood speaks about his humanity: it was imperishable, it was incorruptible, it didn't rot, and that speaks about his sinless nature. And [the wood] was clothed with gold: [which speaks of] humanity clothed with deity. But with Christ it was the other way around; deity clothed with humanity... The manna speaks of spiritual food: it is white [which speaks of] His purity... And Aaron's rod spoke of resurrection. And we have that [assurance of resurrection] in our hearts today, that we are going to see our loved ones again [in heaven]... [And] we are going to see him [Jesus]. We are going to see him! Why am I so sure? Because it was his prayer!

* * *

The great thing in our Christian life is not heaven, but to *see* our Saviour first of all! There's no retirement in this business, no retirement in the Christian life! [We are] never satisfied with the spiritual [condition of the present; we are] always seeking more ground to be possessed. We're all getting older, but the Lord is the same, he never changes ... Encourage the saints! To encourage them is to give them heart! ... It's a good thing to be able to put the saints at peace... What am I trying to do here in Gardenstown today? I'm trying to put *heart* into you! What is ours by promise we should make ours by possession! ... It's good! What is Hebron? Fellowship! ... Fellows-rowing-in-a-ship – that's what it means! All rowing the same way! We're going home!

Where preaching the gospel involved an (often imagined) dual process of 'conviction' and then 'conversion', teaching the Bible was also, by and large, said to have two distinct processes at its core – that of the 'equipping' and 'encouraging' of believers. Thus, where *preaching* existed because of the (logically prior) existence of 'sinners' who needed 'saving', *teaching* existed because of the (no less logically prior) existence of Christians who needed 'feeding'. Above, then, are two sections of transcript taken from two different 'ministry meetings' I heard at the OB towards the end of my fieldwork. Both preachers, like most of the men at the hall, were retired fisherman. The first sermon explained the symbolism of the Ark of the Covenant as described in the Book of Exodus. The second was a call for the congregation to 'follow the Lord with a whole heart'. In seeking to more fully explain the relationship between sermons that equip believers and

those that encourage them, I want to proceed by examining the religious content of both concepts in turn.

First, how might a sermon on the ‘typical significance’²⁷ of the symbolism of the Ark of the Covenant ‘equip’ believers? And what might it equip them for? By examining a sermon preached in a Brethren ‘ministry meeting’, what we are really drawing upon is data taken from a sermon designed to impart knowledge of the Bible to committed Christians. The act of ‘equipping believers’ was often described to me in terms of ‘spiritual warfare’ where the Christian would need to be ‘made ready for the battle’. Crucially, this was seen as being achieved by being constantly ‘in the Word’, that is, by engaging in study of the Bible. Attending these meetings and listening to the teaching that was delivered from the platform was itself an act that equipped the believer – it made the believer ‘ready to face the world’ simply by hearing the words of scripture being preached. Thus, for the Christians of Gamrie, learning about the material properties of the exact type of wood used in the construction of the Ark was not an object of curious trivia, but rather an ‘act of communion’ (Durkheim 2008: 249) that in turn equipped the believer to engage in a further ‘act of renunciation’ (Durkheim 2008: 254). The purpose of a sermon such as this, as it was explained to me, was that this act of hearing – of listening to and studying the Bible – equipped believers to be ‘living sacrifices’, that is, it gave them what they needed, or, perhaps more accurately, it gave them the *words* they needed, to live lives of selfless communion with God; lives that were marked not only by a fact finding bibliomancy, but also by the sacrifice of reverent worship.

Importantly, such teaching, far from being subject to the kind of critique that derives from the fallibility of ‘ordinary’ linguistic practices, was accorded a special place within the speech community. To this end, the Christians of Gamrie, as with Coleman’s charismatic Faith adherents:

²⁷ ‘Typical significance’ here refers to the theology of Biblical ‘typology’ which can be defined as anything that points forward to a future occurrence by holding a prophetic anticipatory correspondence.

...do not regard themselves as *interpreting* the Bible or inspired sermons, but *receiving* them, thus gaining determinate understandings that can be shared by all who apply so-called spiritual ears and eyes to sacred words (Coleman 2000: 127).

Thus, where Coleman views sermonising as both a kind of ‘internalisation’ and ‘externalisation’ (Coleman 2000: 127, 131), I want to suggest that the preaching of the Word is an act of worship that transforms both the (‘internal’) self and the (‘external’) world through the dual notion of teaching and preaching. This worship, then, was enchanted because it had real transformative effects – it ‘saved souls’ and ‘fed’ and ‘built up’ the believer. Further, where preaching as worship was said to be sacrificial (my informants often stressed to me the need to ‘submit to the Word’) we can see how receiving teaching from the Bible was both an act of renunciation and edification, that is, the self was both stripped away and built up at the same time. Thus:

Deploying language becomes, according to this logic, *both a loss of self and a gaining of access to a language from God* that, in its bodily (and other material) effects, transcends the need for interpretation (Coleman 2000: 133. Emphasis added).

The category of the ‘saved’, then, remains central, insofar as it was only ‘born-again believers’ who would ever be able to ‘really worship’ at ministry meetings. Bible *teaching* was for the saved because it equipped them to live their lives of sacrifice and reverent worship, things that the ‘unsaved’, in their ‘unregenerate state’, could never do. In line with the posited spiritual age gap, mature believers were said to be ‘fed’ from the ‘meat’ of Bible *teaching* and unbelievers from the ‘milk’ of the gospel. Importantly however, ‘mature’ Christians did not only eat ‘meat’ from the Word – they too needed the ‘milk’ of the Bible, but in a different form from unbelievers. They needed the milk of encouragement.

In speaking of the milk of encouragement, I refer to the type of Bible teaching that had as its aim the ‘building up’ and edification of believers. Encouragement was spoken of by my informants as a specific ‘spiritual gift’ and one that was often said to be the mark of a good preacher. The value of such a gift was linked to the general perception that Christians in Scotland were living through hard times; society, in the main, was said to be

‘against the things of God’ and was growing increasingly intolerant of a ‘true Biblical witness’. ‘This world is nae wir hame, we’re jist passin through till we get to the other side’ they would say with a real sense of yearning. Teaching from the Bible, then, did not only mean imbibing ‘The Word’ as an act of increasing one’s knowledge of scripture – sometimes referred to disparagingly as ‘head knowledge’ – ‘feeding on the Word of God’ was an activity that was also directed towards the heart:

And Aaron’s rod spoke of resurrection. And we have that [assurance of resurrection] in our hearts today, that we are going to see our loved ones again [in heaven]... [And] we are going to see him [Jesus]. We are going to see him! Why am I so sure? Because it was his prayer!

The hope that the preacher speaks about here is that of the resurrection, spoken of as an encouragement directed towards the heart. And our second sermon quotation is no different. ‘I’m trying to put *heart* into you!’ boomed the preacher. Some in the congregation slowly nodded to indicate their approval. ‘We are going to see him [Jesus]. We are going to see him!’ he shouted. Others sitting near me made subtle but confident noises of excited agreement.

It was sermons such as these that elicited the strongest feelings of enthusiasm and support from regular congregants. Some of the women at Gamrie’s Open Brethren Hall spoke to me about their joyous anticipation of heaven as we filed out of the building after sermons such as these. They told me with unusually unrestrained smiles how old age would no longer hold them back – they would have new and perfected (i.e. sinless) bodies and would be able to experience a closeness of worship unlike anything they would experience on earth. Not only would they be reunited with loved ones who had ‘gone home’, but they would also be ‘in the physical presence of the Lord forever’ – such were the pleasures of the world to come, they assured me. But while they remained on earth, it was being in the hall and hearing ‘The Word’ taught that took them as close to Jesus as they could hope to be ‘this side of eternity’. Similarly, other friends spoke of being ‘transported into the very throne room of heaven’ when listening to the Bible being taught. Still others described listening to such teaching as ‘a real feast’, sometimes turning to me at the end of a sermon and remarking with a smile ‘now that was a good

meal wasn't it Joe?' It was listening to 'The Word' being taught, then, that gave these ordinary church members the greatest reassurance of their salvation ('we're going home!') and the strongest reason to 'persevere in the faith'. After all, as my friends often sought to remind me, the weekly 'meals' we enjoyed at the hall as the Bible was taught would one day be replaced by the eagerly anticipated 'perpetual feast' to be consumed once we were in the eternal presence of the 'Incarnate Word' in heaven.

Importantly, all of this reinforces our earlier suggestion of the centrality of two types of person – the saved and the unsaved – for 'going home' means going to heaven, and the men who stood and preached that message of encouragement and hope did so with only one audience in mind – the 'saved'. It was only with 'fellow believers' that this heavenly home would be shared. There was no 'equipping' to be offered to the 'unbeliever' through Bible teaching and certainly no encouragement to be offered to them unless they responded to the 'glad tidings'. They were already fully prepared for their lost eternity and could only be rescued from their fate through the preaching of the gospel, which, in a very real sense, was their equipping, their encouragement, their mode of conviction and their means of conversion all rolled into one.

Failed Performances

Yet there is a danger of my suggesting a picture that is altogether too monolithic by giving insufficient attention to disordered performances and the messy reality that follows. 'When meaning becomes an explicit endeavour' Tomlinson reminds us, 'one begins to see the shadowy outlines of meaning's limits' (Tomlinson 2006: 140-141). So what happens when performances fail? What happens if, for example, a gospel sermon is lacklustre or a ministry meeting is discouraging? Might it be possible for a sermon to entirely miss the point, if, say, a gospel preacher were to speak out, as happened during my fieldwork, against the evils of credit cards rather than preach the need to be saved? In following Tomlinson (2006, 2009), I hold that sermons are a kind of performance, and as such, are liable to failure. Furthermore, it is important to examine such failures because they instruct us about what a performance, normatively speaking, *should* be like, not only in style, but also in content. In briefly considering a few failed performances, I want to

suggest that they were deemed unsuccessful not in the first instance because they represented a breakdown of ‘meaning’, but because their content and style were deemed to be inappropriate for the type of sermon that was expected to be delivered. Sermons were generally failures, then, not because they were said to be heretical or nonsensical, but because they were categorical anomalies, that is, in terms of the language deployed, they were simply the wrong kind of performance.

My first example is of a sermon preached by a man whom I will call Amery Moran. His sermon was entitled ‘running to win’ and, despite its encouraging sounding title, was all about ‘the solemn reality of Christ’s final judgement’. What followed was an incredibly intense forty minute tirade against those who called themselves Christians but were ‘not true believers’:

You are either a card-carrying Christian or a cross-carrying Christian, and if you are only a card-carrying Christian, you are in trouble! There are going to be those who stand before Christ [on the day of judgement] and they are going to be in a heap of ashes! There is one thing that God detests more than anything else, lukewarmness! If you feel this word [sermon] is for you, then go on your knees and pray!

The general criticism of this sermon was that it was overwhelmingly discouraging. The congregation, it being a morning service at the Kirk, was predominantly ‘born-again’ members, and as such, these people came to church hoping to learn something new about the Bible and have their souls encouraged. But they received neither of these things and instead left with a sense that they had been wrung out by a visiting preacher who suspected them all of being lukewarm fakers. The cool reception that he got at the end of the service as everyone filed past him at the door, shaking hands as they went, was palpable. The message wasn’t a helpful challenge, a man said to me a few days later, but simply felt judgemental. ‘How did they ever expect to have any young folk in the church with sermons like *that?*’ he asked me, shaking his head.

‘Rituals that focus on the articulation of achievement of meaning can also suggest meaning’s boundaries and, perhaps, violate those boundaries’ Tomlinson (2006: 140)

tells us. Yet Amery's sermon seemed to be a direct violation, not of meaning, as such – for the congregation seemed to know all too well what he meant – but rather of the appropriate content for the occasion of worship. And he wasn't the only one who fell into such a trap. One man in the village was constantly being criticised for his preaching – he spoke for too long people complained, sometimes for over an hour; his sermons were boring and too heavy; they felt like lectures that were 'lacking heart' and went over everyone's heads. He was also accused of no longer giving 'an old fashioned gospel' (typified positively by Murdo's sermon as quoted previously), but instead preached sermons that were discouraging and devoid of love. 'You canna fault his Bible knowledge' people would say to me, 'he kens it *aa*. But that's the problem, ken, it's all heed knowledge, there's nae love in it ataw you ken'. As with Amery, this preacher was disliked for both his content and style – his sermons were deemed to be overbearing and discouraging. Their failure, then, seemed to be a failure of 'emotional enskilment'²⁸, that is, a failure to produce the right emotional reaction within the right context. Teaching the Bible to Christians through a sermon that contained 'no love' and 'no heart' was an error that proved fatal – it was said that Amery would probably not be invited back to preach, while this other preacher eventually left Gamrie to minister elsewhere.

But sermons were also deemed to be failures because they were off point and confusing. On one occasion at a gospel meeting at the OB, an Argentinean missionary preached about Jesus' last days in Jerusalem by using a 3D wooden map that he had erected at the front of the hall. He then proceeded to re-enact (in differently sounding hushed voices) the conversation between Jesus and the disciples at the last supper. It was not until right at the end of the sermon that the preacher mentioned the gospel message – after a long description of how anti-venom is extracted from snakes to cure those who have been bitten, the preacher suddenly levelled his gaze at the congregation and simply said 'the blood of Jesus Christ is the only antidote to the poison of sin... so you, this evening, can accept Him before it is too late and you end up in the lake of fire!' And that was it. The sermon was over and there was a prayer and a hymn and then the service ended. 'Well that was different!', a man wearing hearing aids said to me, I think rather more loudly

²⁸ While I do not want develop this idea in detail here, I deal with (emotional and linguistic) enskilment in more detail in Chapter V on fishing.

than he realised, as I turned in the pew to greet him. But it was David's embarrassed grin that said more than his actual comment. And judging by the conversations I had with folk over a cup of tea after the meeting, everyone in the hall was thinking the same as he was.

Sermons then, as linguistic performances, can and do fail. They can fail by being discouraging, confusing, at odds with the imagined spiritual condition of the audience or simply bizarre. Thus:

Rituals of meaning-making necessarily create the possibility of a vague and chaotic realm in which meanings might be present but cannot be made, or might be absent and have attention called to such absence (Tomlinson 2006: 141).

I myself experienced both the vague and the chaotic when listening to these and other sermons in the field. Yet the point remains that these sermons were memorable exactly because they were unusual and they were unusual because they were performative failures and were spoken of as such by those who listened to them. The obvious comment that follows is that most sermons were not failures but successes because they conformed closely to local normative expectations about what made a good sermon that appropriately catered for the (often imagined) audience.

Performative success, then, was in large part determined by a preacher's ability to maintain a clear distinction between the need to *preach* and the need to *teach*; where preaching the gospel was done in order to bring about 'conviction' and 'conversion' to the unsaved, teaching the Bible sought to 'equip' and 'encourage' the saved. Yet 'preaching to the converted' was a common occurrence, and not one that was deemed a performative failure on that basis. This is because, as I have argued already, listening to the gospel was inherently an (eminently enchanted) act of worship insofar as it was described by ordinary churchgoers as a foundational part of their Christian 'diet', which, because it 'always gave an impression of Christ' that took them 'into His near presence', was an act of hearing that one 'never grew out of'. Such worship, then, was clearly characterised by the transformative effects of both immanence and transcendence.

‘The act of worship is the act of hearing’

I want to return to the theoretical punch line of the opening comments I made at the start of this chapter, namely that the sacrifice of worship involves a figurative eating of the sacred being through the imbibing of the Word (of God) through the ear. I refer here to the act of hearing. Where preaching of the glad tidings was described as ‘coming under the sound of the gospel’ and where teaching the Bible was explained as ‘coming under the sound of The Word’, it became clear, over the course of my research, that there was, to put it mildly, a strong link between words and hearing and worship. But importantly, this trope of eating was not restricted to the one phrase I have already mentioned – ‘feasting upon the Word’. People also often spoke of the unsaved as ‘hungry souls’ and the saved as ‘hungering after the Word’. I remember on one occasion, how, during a gospel preaching, the sermon reached its climax when the minister proclaimed: ‘It is an ambition of mine to see this church *filled* with people *hungry* to do business with God!’

What then, are we to make of this language of hunger and eating? Its significance as a local trope of worship is given further weight in view of the fact that it is a theme that has strong resonance among other, albeit quite different, evangelical circles. Coleman (2000), writing on the ‘internalisation’ of the Biblical text among charismatic Protestants in the Word of Life church in Sweden, makes the following observation:

Internalisation refers to the process of *incorporating* language within the self in a way that is... embodied. It is a form of self-inscription (as opposed to description) that leads believers to understand themselves as ‘words made flesh’. (Coleman 2000: 118. Emphasis original).

Internalisation then is a kind of embodiment. Words are incorporated within the self to the point that they actually begin to constitute the flesh of the believer, that is, the believer undergoes their very own textual incarnation. Crucially for my argument here, Coleman does not only describe the embodiment of the Word, but also its being eaten:

Perhaps the most striking example of how the Word is invested with physical qualities is evident in the way many faith adherents *describe the process of reading the Bible as a form of ingestion akin to eating*. One can hunger for or ‘get filled’ with the Word... In this view, the text is embodied in the person, who becomes a walking, talking representation of its power. Eating is an especially powerful image because it points to a notion of internalising truth directly, bypassing the distorting effects of both social context and intellect... *Internalisation therefore refers to an incarnational practice* [whereby] people came to regard themselves as physically assimilating and thereby actually being taken over by scripturally derived... words (Coleman 2000: 127-129. Emphasis added).

It was actually not until one Sunday in September, having been in the field for almost a year, that I found myself increasingly wrestling with the relationship between ‘hearing’ and ‘eating’ as locally salient tropes of worship. And then I ‘sat under’ two separate sermons on the topic of hearing in the space of a few hours and then a further two over the fortnight that followed. The first sermon I heard that day was at the FPCU. The minister preached on the Queen of Sheba’s visit to Solomon’s temple and gave the following words of introduction:

Our purpose on going up to God’s house should be to hear what God has to say to us... Prepare your heart to hear from Him... *The act of worship is the act of hearing!* Listening to God, listening to what God says to us. And God speaks from His Word! The Word of God should have a central place in every service. *It is an act of worship to hear... Worship is listening! Worship is hearing!* Listening to what God will say... As we come to the House of the Lord we should pray “Lord, speak to me, open my ears, open my heart, show me Thy will, teach me Thy way! Lord, speak to me!”

Having left this particular church service to attend a CB ‘Bible reading’ straight after lunch, I was taken aback when, right at the end of the meeting, the main speaker, seeking to summarise the discussion of the preceding hour about the nature of the forgiveness of sins, said the following:

So the secret really is in that verse eighteen: ‘*take heed therefore how ye hear*’²⁹. [It] depends what *kynd*³⁰ we hear and some of us that [have been] born with a critical mind, I think it’s sometimes difficult.

While I was surprised that this theme of hearing should emerge twice in one day, it wasn’t really until the middle of the next week, when attending a Cooneyite funeral in the village that I really started to pay attention. The preacher was speaking from the Book of Acts about the conversion of Lydia, ‘whose heart’, he read aloud from his Bible, ‘the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul’³¹. Yet it was his summary of this verse that struck me more than the words themselves; ‘she had to have *this* open first’ he said emphatically, giving his ear a dramatic series of downward tugs:

She opened her *ear* to God’s messenger, and then it says ‘whose heart the Lord opened’. You know, when God gets into a person’s heart, there’s no limit to the possibilities in the life.

But how exactly did my informants listen? How was it that they experienced the process of hearing? It seems that hearing ‘properly’ was made possible through the medium of emotion. Interestingly, in this sense, there is no real difference between hearing and listening – hearing ‘properly’ means ‘really’ listening i.e. listening carefully with one’s heart and whole body. If one is not listening, then one is not ‘really’ hearing. The minister mentioned above, who was criticised by my informants for delivering sermons that felt like dull and discouraging lectures was being criticised for giving the wrong kind of performance, namely, one that spoke to the head (‘heed knowledge’) and not to the ‘heart’. During successful performances, then, emotions ran high, with some congregants often providing their own barely audible commentary – ‘yes Lord’; ‘thank you Jesus’; ‘yes, amen’ – over what was being said. Others stared intently at their feet, nodding their heads; others closed their eyes, apparently in prayer; still others sat forwards in their seats, gripping their Bibles tightly almost as if their excitement required them to hold

²⁹ Luke 8.18.

³⁰ ‘Kynd’ here meaning disposition, nature, sort i.e. ‘it depends on the nature of our hearing’.

³¹ Acts 16.14.

onto something to keep their balance. All such embodied forms of listening are clearly reminiscent of Hirschkind's (2001) ethnography of sermon audition in Cairo, and are indicative that listening with the ear and the heart also involves many other parts of the body – the head, the eyes, the hands, the feet, and so on.

But what precise roles do these other parts of the body have? And what is their connection with listening? It is interesting to note that Mary and Iain and Noel and others all explicitly described reading silently in one's head as a form of listening; God was said to 'speak' at such times, and, as Mary often said, God would 'give her a word' whereby she would 'hear His voice'. This being the case, might it also be said that one could 'eat' words of scripture through the eyes? I think not, insofar as sight was a sense that was distrusted by local Christians. Indeed, the Devil was said to trick people by various 'illusions'; it was the 'eyes' of such Christians that had led them into various forms of idolatry³². As already described in Chapter I, visual adornment of both the human body and church buildings was kept intentionally limited for these same reasons. Equally, informants of mine who had gone on pilgrimages to Israel spoke to me of their revulsion of the highly ornate decoration of Catholic and Orthodox churches they had seen there.

What then of the deaf? Can they be 'saved'? The answer, given the power accorded to the silent reading of scripture, is yes. As Mary tells us, God 'speaks' through 'The Word', a voice that is audible to Christians through, among other ways, private reading. Intriguingly, the blind too were said to have access to this same kind of hearing-by-reading. A particularly memorable story of just such a case circulated among Gamrie's Christians during my fieldwork where it was told of a Christian man who suffered terribly as a result of an accident that left him burned, blind and deaf. Eventually his only way of 'hearing The Word' was by reading a Braille Bible with the tip of his tongue. The story often ended with the teller commenting upon how 'sweet' those words of scripture 'tasted' to that poor man.

³² This was said by local Christians to be prototypically the case insofar as Eve was led astray by the Serpent in the Garden of Eden at the point when she saw that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge was 'pleasing to the eye' (see Genesis 3.6). Clearly however, the eyes and sight were not always associated with the realm of the demonic, indeed, as previously mentioned, receiving the convicting 'sight' of one's sin was said to be a key part in the process of conversion.

Yet it might be objected, that, in my analysis of the practice of listening, much of my ethnographic evidence emerges not from those who hear, but those who speak i.e. from preachers and not from ‘ordinary’ congregants. Yet I feel that this objection is misplaced insofar as listening can only be analysed within the context of what is actually heard i.e. the words of preachers. Further, there was no strict division between speaking preachers and listening congregants, for, although only men preached, it was also the case that all male members were actively engaged in both preaching and teaching. Thus, men who stood on the platform to preach also constantly sought to remind those in the congregation who sat in silence listening that he was also preaching to himself, for he too needed to hear the message that God would have him speak through proclamation of ‘The Word’. It is important to realise, then, that preaching and teaching were, in a very real sense, also a form of listening.

It was only a couple of weeks later that the message of the spiritual necessity of ‘hearing’ was to be declared within the village again, this time at a special evangelistic meeting at the OB. That night the preacher was speaking about ‘faith’.

You might think that faith is a mystical thing – hard to define... but that’s not the case. It’s very simple. The Bible says that *faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God*. ... Faith is to trust in what you have *heard* and not what you have seen. What you’ve heard us pray about! What you’ve heard us testify about! What you’ve heard us speak about! ... If you are going to trust someone you need to be 100% certain of what you have heard about him. You would need to be sure of your source. ... And that brings us to the Bible. *Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God*. ... This is God’s Word and this is what you’ve to depend upon. *The Living Word of God!* The Bible is infallible. It has been attacked and burned and banned and criticised... and the Bible is still standing and it is standing four square! It’s unshaken! It’s immovable! It is accurate and it is true. What we have is an accurate translation: it’s dependable. ... What we have is the very breath of God upon its pages! ... It’s inspired! It’s God breathed! It’s the very Word of God. It’s the very breath of God! ... God has communicated to us and what we have is the book the Bible... and it’s still standing! It liveth and abideth forever and ever! All I’m doing to you is

communicating to you what is in this book. And if you are going to put your trust in a person you have never met... *base your decision upon this book ... Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God!*

Taken together, then, these four ‘ethnographic moments’ help to clarify all that I have been arguing in this chapter so far. Firstly, ‘faith’, which, for my informants, was synonymous with being a Christian, ‘is to trust what you have heard and not what you have seen’. Secondly, it is not ‘the eye of faith’ but the ear that is most active in this process; ‘she had to open *this* first... she opened her *ear*’ the Cooneyite preacher insisted to a congregation of mourners. Which is why, thirdly, it is of the utmost importance to ‘take heed therefore how ye hear’; the Christian is defined by their faith which is itself defined by hearing. One can only listen if one’s ears are open, and further, if one is listening in the right way; ‘it depends what kynd we hear’, that is, it depends on the nature (or disposition) of our hearing. If it is not only hearing that matters, but also the way in which a believer hears; ‘taking heed’ is non-negotiable. This is all the more the case, fourthly, when we realise that ‘the act of worship is the act of hearing’.

All the preachers and congregants quoted above – all of whom were engaged in both speaking and listening – would, I am convinced, not only agree with this last statement, but would also want to stress its literal truth. ‘Worship is listening! Worship is hearing!’ shouted the minister, the words ringing out across the three quarters empty church. In terms of Gamrie’s local folk theology, this makes perfect sense, insofar as the friends who sat beside me in the pews constantly sought to remind me that hearing was an act of worship and worship was an act of sacrifice. Importantly however, the kind of sacrifice that my informants saw themselves as undertaking would not have been the kind that Durkheim (2008) or Robertson Smith (1972) would have recognised as such in the ‘traditional’ sense. It was not an ox slain upon an altar for example, but was instead described to me as a ‘living sacrifice’, that is, a life of reverence directed towards the person of the sacred (Durkheim 2008). It was the ‘sinful lusts of the flesh’ that were sacrificed – the body was ‘starved’ of its desires, and, in the process, was said to have been ‘put to death’. It was ‘the spirit’, further, that was said to be active in this ‘killing’ of this body of flesh. Such ‘killing’ took place by the living of a self-sacrificial life of

reverence that was itself marked by the ‘spiritual disciplines’ of Bible reading and prayer. It was this life of reverence, crucially, that transformed the sacrificed ‘flesh’ of the Christian body into a new body made of words. In killing the flesh, its sinful lusts died with it, only to be ‘brought back to new spiritual life’ in and through the ‘self-inscription’ (Coleman 2000: 118) of reverent worship.

It was hearing ‘the Word’, then, that was the method of undertaking the ‘life of sacrifice’ of local Christians as a dual process of ‘starving’ the flesh and ‘feeding’ the spirit. ‘The Word’, as the ‘sacrificial meal’ (Robertson Smith 1972) was to be ‘feasted upon’ like any other, but with the difference that the ‘eating’, as I have tried to show above, was done not through the mouth but through the ear, that is, by hearing and listening. And it was this that transformed the bodily ‘flesh’ of Iain and Noel and Mary into words that were then re-embodied through the act of listening to sermons. The flesh was ‘killed’, transformed into words and then re-embodied by being eaten through the ear, giving my Christian friends a new body and a new self. This seems less surprising the more we realise that not only is the sacrifice of Christian reverence living, but so also, to many evangelicals, is the Bible. Indeed: ‘strategies of scriptural incarnation turn the letters of the Bible into the workings of the *living word*’ (Coleman 2000: 133).

To this end, the intended purpose of the last preacher I quoted was clear – he was calling himself and those who listened to him (as, indeed, they were ‘calling’ themselves just as he was ‘hearing’ himself) to sacrifice their ‘flesh’ to ‘The Book’; to forsake all others in a self-renouncing and worshipful commitment to the incarnate Word. ‘Base your decision upon this book ... Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God!’ This was also, moreover, the intended purpose of all those sermons I and my informants heard preached in churches, living rooms, on the street and in the fish market. In hearing these enchanting words preached, my informants were calling themselves to a sacrificial life of reverence. Insofar as the act of worship was said to be an act of hearing, this sacrifice was undertaken by ‘feasting upon’ the ‘living Word’ of the preaching of the gospel and the teaching of the Bible. Having considered the local practice of sermonising as both an act of speaking and listening, let us now move to consider another form of the enchanting power of words and language by examining the ‘giving’ and ‘hearing’ of ‘testimony’.

Chapter IV

Testimony

I argued in the previous chapter that ‘preaching’ and ‘teaching’ deploy emotionally enskiled words that seek to have a transformative (that is, enchanting) effect upon the world through the ‘saving of sinners’ and the ‘encouragement of believers’. This chapter – on ‘testimony’ – will argue along similar lines, but with a greater emphasis on the power of emotion to enchant the speaking self and the listening other. In order to suggest how this is the case, I want us to turn to consider Alasdair’s testimony:

Alasdair: I couldnae come out my bedroom this morning without speaking to my Lord. If I didnae have Jesus with me just now I couldnae speak to you. But I know that’s he’s.... **[starts to weep]**. Its emotional, you ken, with me, I mean, I’m a strong man, dinna get me wrong, I’m a powerful man... but when I’m speaking about my Lord, I cry.

Alasdair is 65, a ‘born-again’ Christian and former fisherman who lives to ‘speak to as much people as I can... [about] the Lord’. But what does it mean when committed Christians like Alasdair describe themselves as ‘born-again’? And why would Alasdair make it his mission in life to speak about ‘the Lord’?

It will be my argument in this chapter that ‘giving testimony’ (the story of how one became ‘born again’) constitutes the self as a ‘sincere’ (Keane 1997, 2002) and ‘committed’ (Howell 2007) Christian through emotional acts of self-revelation to then mobilise that self to convert others to the faith. By displaying such conversion narratives through a highly conventionalised (Bielo 2009, Coleman 2006, Crapanzano 2000, Harding 2000) emotional performance, the ‘born-again’ Christian makes sense of their own personhood, not by creating a ‘uniquely emergent’ story of personal religious identity, but rather by publicly identifying with a shared religious orthodoxy. Equally, ‘giving testimony’ needs to be understood within its local context as forming part of a wider project of modernity (Keane 2007), and as such, as an idiom for the struggle to

make sense of rapid social, economic, demographic and religious change. Crucially, this struggle is always unfinished, with the enchantment of conversion experienced as a perpetual state of ongoing transformation.

In what follows I present data from just one interview. Although I interviewed dozens of Christian fishermen, Alasdair's story seems typical of many of the highly emotional conversion accounts I collected while in the field. In choosing to focus upon Alasdair, then, I hope also to be able to encapsulate something of the stories of people like James, a man who was converted at sea when his boat ran aground and his father and three of the crew were lost, or the stories of Jim and Alec, two best friends who had owned and skippered a boat together, and who were converted within a short time of each other as young fishermen. In seeking to do so, I deploy Alasdair's (auto)biography not as a 'representation [of] epistemology' but rather in a way 'which places the emphasis on indigenous ontology' (Tsintjilonis 2007: 173). In this sense, not only do I treat Alasdair's words as capable of speaking in more general terms to the wider religious themes found in the testimonies of others, but I do so in a way that focuses not upon (theological) theories of knowledge, but upon local affective experiences of 'conversion-as-being-in-the-world'.

In treating conversion as a way of being in the world, Alasdair's act of giving testimony can be seen as a specific kind of autobiographical interview and one that needs to be understood in terms of its particular relationship to two very Protestant concerns, that of sincerity and that of commitment. Below, I present sections of transcript with my own analysis woven through it. The quotes are given with in-text notes on Alasdair's display of emotion, which are included because they are central to the claims I am going to make about testimony as sincere and committed autobiography. Where there has been a real 'reluctance among academics to take emotion seriously' (Riis and Woodhead 2010: 207), it is my intention to place religious emotion at the 'heart' of my analysis. By doing so I will show the role emotion has to play in the formation of the 'born-again' person through the 'self-processes' (Csordas 1994a: 5) of sincerity, commitment and confession.

‘I got saved at the sea’

JW: Maybe you could tell me something about how you became a Christian?

Alasdair: Well, I was born in [north east of Scotland]... and I went to church with my granny and granda and to Sunday school. All my pals were away on a Sunday afternoon playing football and I used to rebel to my mother [saying]: “Look, I need to be with my friends”... so when I was 14 I stopped going to the church completely. At 15 I went away to sea... and I just went with my pals... drinking and all the stuff young fellas do. Then when I was 21 I [married] my wife and... I come home this day and said to my wife I says, “I’m finished with this drink – this is nae a life – I need to be with my family”... I [also] used to swear, but my family didnae, and I says, “well Alasdair, you’ve stopped drinking and you dinna miss it, [so] you could stop swearing” and I did **[voice breaking]** and a couple of years after that I got saved. I got saved at the sea. I came to the Lord at the sea and I gave my heart to the Lord at that time.

Over the duration of my fieldwork, having heard many people ‘give their testimony’ in formal church meetings as well as to each other in casual conversation, I quickly learned that the performance of testifying relied on the reproduction of predictable forms of narrative. Every testimony, almost without fail, began with the words ‘I was born...’. They continued by describing early spiritual experiences and later times of rebellion and culminated with a statement about the moment of conversion: ‘I got saved at the sea’. Yet conversion was described to me not simply as a ‘moment’ but as a process of ongoing transformation. It is important to note that such a view of conversion is found across many different forms of Christianity, a point made well by Harris who argues that, for many Christians, ‘the permanent threat of sin... means that the drama of conversion is constantly re-enacted... whether through baptism, the confession of sins, or reconversion’ (Harris 2006: 72). It is the relationship between testifying to a conversion experience and wider notions of Christian confession that make up the substance of this chapter.

When I first arrived in the field, I rather naively asked potential informants if I could record their ‘life history’ and, unsurprisingly, received a mixture of polite refusal and

nervous suspicion. As the months went on I changed tack and started asking people for ‘interviews’. This seemed more readily intelligible to those in the village but still did not seem to work; key informants who were ordinarily keen to talk to me about ‘spiritual things’ seemed evasive when I pursued them for what I kept calling ‘interviews’. It was really not until a local friend of mine suggested that I should hear so-and-so’s *testimony* that it dawned on me that there was a well established and entirely intelligible folk method of ‘interviewing’ being used locally all the time – all I had to do was stop asking people for interviews and start asking people if they would give me their ‘testimony’. Upon asking exactly this question, I was quickly given a long list of people who would be willing to share their testimony with me and busied myself with asking the question ‘could you tell me something about how you became a Christian?’, which, without fail, produced long autobiographical narratives where I would simply sit in silence and listen for anything from twenty minutes to several hours.

The spurious quest for the ‘uniquely emergent’

An obvious objection arises here: if I was so quickly given a list of people who would be willing to tell me how they were ‘born again’ after simply transferring my questioning from ‘life histories’ to ‘testimonies’, does that not indicate that the data to which I was given access – the retelling of the rehearsed testimony – was in some sense nothing more than a shallow ‘official line’ that simply parroted the ‘dominant ideology’ of conversion so heavily invested in by the religious groups I was researching? Indeed, as Crapanzano (2000) has observed, commenting on the context of Christian fundamentalism in America, the ‘once I was lost, now I am found’ type narrative is hardly in short supply when examining what he calls ‘*prêt-à-porter* testimonies [which]... are, for the most part, conventional, but that conventionality is usually concealed by their intensely personal quality’ (Crapanzano 2000: 31-32). Bearing this in mind, was it not my job as an anthropologist to avoid having the verbal wool pulled over my eyes (or perhaps ears) by seeking out something more ‘uniquely emergent’ as one colleague suggested? Should I not have searched for something that went beyond the superficiality of rehearsed ‘convention’ to find the ‘really real’ that had been so artfully ‘concealed’?

I actually think not. This is because, I argue, in looking for the ‘uniquely emergent’, what my colleague actually wanted me to provide was a narrative that was unrestricted by form and unencumbered by past retelling, that is, something that was without structure and without history, in other words, a narrative that was free from ideology³³. No such narrative exists. Structure (in this case the pre-existent ideology of a ‘religiously orthodox’ conversion narrative) and history (in this case previous acts of retelling) are things that persons as ‘social actors’ (Goffman 1958) can play with, analyse, challenge and manipulate, but never escape completely. Indeed, even the agency of our thoughts is constrained by the history of the ideological structures that surround us – hence Bourdieu’s call for the social sciences to turn their intellectual practice towards ‘the systematic exploration of the ‘unthought categories of thought’ which delimit... the practical carrying out of social inquiry’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:40). Where Bourdieu speaks of categories, I speak of structures. The effect is the same – both are what they are because they are a form of practice. They delimit both ‘thought’ and ‘unthought’ (See Lukes 1974:24-25) through their managerial control over linguistic (in this case testimonial) utterances.

Harding’s classic work *The Book of Jerry Falwell* (2000), which examines religious and political rhetoric among Christian fundamentalists in America, gives some instructive context on this point. In her analysis of the ‘fundamental Baptist tongue’ (2000: 33) and by describing conversion ‘as a process of acquiring a specific religious language’ (2000: 34), Harding makes a very similar point to the one I am making here. Specifically, ‘giving testimony’ necessarily draws upon a pre-existing ideology, and, in so doing, becomes not an epiphenomenon of some other (hidden) cultural practice, but rather exists as its own distinct practice. If, according to my reading of Harding (2000), conversion is conversion to a language and not just to a religious orthodoxy, then the search for the ‘uniquely emergent’ is the search for that which does not exist. This is surely the case where ‘giving testimony’ involves the telling of a story that is marked not primarily by its ‘intensely personal quality’ (Crapanzano 2000: 32) but by the exact opposite, that is, by

³³ In speaking of ideology here, I am not referring to it in the classic Marxian sense, but rather with reference to its use in socio-linguistics (Silverstein 1979) whereby language is held to be tacitly structured by the implicit, that is, by a received notion of what is (and is not) possible on the basis of what can (and cannot) be said.

its highly conventional structure and content. ‘Giving testimony’, then, has little to do with the ‘uniquely emergent’ and much to do with what I have called the ‘pre-existent’, especially where ‘we conceive of conversion as a process of acquiring a specific religious language’ (Harding 2000: 34). It is, in sum, the deployment of an inherited linguistic practice, not the creation of a unique and emergent story, which matters when giving (and listening to) ‘born again’ conversion narratives.

Yet this does not stop some of us from searching. My critique of the intellectual quest for the ‘really real’ (or, as it was put to me, the ‘uniquely emergent’) narrative as free from the ideological trappings of form and rehearsal finds a parallel with Keane’s (2006) critical analysis of the Christian’s quest for transcendence. For Keane, transcendence (and the Protestant tradition generally) wants three things that modernity cannot give it: (i) a self free from the body, (ii) meaning free from language and (iii) agency free from the social other (Keane 2002: 310). Thus, for many Protestants, (and surely for many anthropologists), material things are problematic because they cannot speak for themselves – ‘the inability of objects to determine their interpretation leads people into false beliefs’ (Keane 2002: 312). All that we can say about objects is also true of words: words and objects *objectify* identity – they are social and relational. Intriguingly, it is the inescapably social life of words that seems, in part, to be causing the anxiety here, both for social scientists and for their informants (see Keane 2002; Cannell 2005, Robbins 2003, Sahlins 1996). This quest for a ‘truer’ emergent meaning that lies just below the ‘surface’ waiting to be discovered, is fuelled, it seems, by a desire for a kind of transcendence: a narrative free from structure, meaning free from an intended audience and agency free from rehearsal.

So why this search for the ‘uniquely emergent’? Whence the anxiety that I might have ‘missed something’ in paying too close attention to the ‘surface’ cultural script rather than looking for the ‘deeper’, ‘real’ meaning? The answer is found in the fact that, on one level at least, the Protestant quest for transcendence and the intellectual quest for the ‘uniquely emergent’ actually amount to much the same thing, that is, they both amount to what Keane identifies as a search for ‘sincerity’ (Keane 1997, 2002, 2006; see also Trilling 1971). The (in Keane’s terms, very Protestant) critique my academic colleagues

levelled at me went something like this: I might have missed something because those who told me their testimonies might have been ‘having me on’ – they might have been insincere – by parroting the ‘ready-made’ surface narrative in order to hide from me the ‘really real’ story of their testimony. Thus, the quest for sincerity and the quest for the ‘uniquely emergent’ share the same anxiety about the way in which the surface can mask that which is underneath. But why should this masking matter much to us? It is because, according to both of these quests, that which is underneath (the inner self) is that which ‘*really matters*’.

The dualisms that I have been criticising seem to speak for themselves insofar as they privilege a certain Western ontological view of ‘authenticity... in both commonsense and anthropological ideas about culture’ (Handler 1986: 2). Thus, the ‘shallow’ is shunned in favour of the ‘deep’. The ‘true’ is prized over the ‘false’. ‘Mere appearances’ are derided in favour of ‘real substance’. What is ‘really below the surface’ is sought over and against that which is ‘just on the surface level’. The ‘rehearsed’ performance and the ‘structured’ narrative are seen as suspect where the ‘uniquely emergent’ is accepted with implicit trust.

Yet I want to place a partial qualification on some of what I have been saying so far. If ‘giving testimony’, as I have argued, is not properly understood by searching for some ‘uniquely emergent’ narrative but is rather to be analysed in terms of an inherited and thus pre-existent linguistic ideology, and if, in my reading of Harding, conversion is about conversion to a specific religious language (Harding 2000: 34) then we might want to ask how this fits with Robbins’ (2004) approach to Christian conversion as cultural discontinuity. As I will argue in more detail below, ‘giving testimony’ is not just about registering a standardised statement of conversion within the confines of a specific local linguistic ideology (in this sense conversion is not just about the way in which change is subsumed within fixed ‘cultural particularity’ (see Keller 2005: 243, 2006, 2007: 23-24)) but is also about ‘real’ (discontinuous) change. All I will say at this point is that such change, while not entirely novel, is still real change despite the fact that it is narrated ideologically and retains a history – that is, it is still embedded in a pre-existing linguistic performance that is locally intelligible exactly because it is not ‘uniquely emergent’. It is,

in sum, experienced as a ‘real change’, but it is a change that is (collectively) known and experienced, not through utter novelty, but in and through a shared ideology that itself has a shared history.

In what follows I want to challenge this dichotomy between ‘rehearsed ideology’ and the ‘uniquely emergent’ by suggesting that such a dualism implicitly privileges (in a very ‘Protestant’ way (Keane 2002)) the ‘inner’ as truthful and the ‘surface’ as uninteresting at best and insincere at worst, and in so doing, makes external form an inferior object of analysis. The ‘form’, the ‘structure’, the ‘surface narrative’, the ‘cultural script’ is all there is; there is nothing ‘deeper’ or more ‘real’ or more ‘sincere’ to be had when hearing someone’s testimony because it is through the very act of speaking and listening – through the standardised performance of rehearsing the self – that one is known and made knowable as a sincere and committed Christian. I can still remember being asked to give my testimony to a group of local teenagers (mostly boys studying ‘Nautical’ at the local technical college before they went away to sea) when volunteering at the Gamrie Kirk youth club. As I stood to give my own *prêt-à-porter* conversion narrative I wondered what the other volunteers imagined was the purpose of my doing so. The answer, perhaps unsurprisingly, came to me not by speaking, but by listening.

As I attended other ‘testimony nights’ at the Kirk, the FPCU and other churches outside Gamrie, I too began to see remarkable (‘structural’) similarity, both in terms of what was said and, interestingly, how it was received. Listening, too, seemed to be carefully constructed from a series of (primarily emotional) reactions. In this way, Christian listeners were expected to receive words of testimony with joy and encouragement, just as they did when listening to the ‘preaching’ of the gospel and the ‘teaching’ of the Bible. The ‘unsaved’, on the other hand, were expected (and generally appeared) to listen in a rather different way, that is, by receiving words of testimony with solemnity and anxiety, in order to index the fact that they were ‘really listening’ and being ‘truly effected’ by what was being said. On one occasion the Braehead congregation held a ‘testimony night’ during which a local man (whom I will call Danny) who had suffered greatly from a heroin addiction spoke of his past life and recent conversion as a result of attending a Christian rehab clinic. Not being in Gamrie that night, I was told, on my return, of how

‘powerful’ the evening had been. The hall – usually almost completely empty – was said to have been packed with young people who would normally never attend any place of worship. Many were said to have been moved to tears as they sat listening to Danny – said to be ‘a real trophy of God’s grace’ – and left the hall apparently ‘deeply troubled’ about their unconverted state. The hope of my Christian informants (who related the story to me again and again over the days that followed) was that these ‘unsaved souls’ would ‘be moved’ (emotionally) to ‘give their lives to Christ’.

While it was obvious that not all followed this normative pattern of ‘conviction’ giving way to ‘conversion’ – with many of the teenagers at the Gamrie Kirk youth club giggling, fidgeting and yawning their way through the weekly testimonies – it is also true that some did. Several of those who told me their testimonies mentioned how hearing the conversion narratives of others had had a significant influence on their own ‘decision for Christ’, describing to me those same emotions (solemnity, anxiety and fear giving way to joy, relief and assurance) that my friends had observed in those who sat listening to Danny that night. This leads me to conclude, then, that the ‘giving’ and hearing of testimony, is, much like a dance, a performance. And importantly, performances have rules (Turner 1988). As with sermonising, what we see in ‘testimony’ is the performance of a kind of verbal and aural embodiment, which, by operating in and through pre-existent linguistic structures, makes what is said and heard not only intelligible but also (sincerely) formative of a certain type of self, that is, of the self of the ‘born again’ believer.

Before I continue by presenting another section of transcript, it is important to note here that these testimonies did not simply address the moment of conversion but instead went much further than that. As I sat and listened, watching people give their testimony, I became deeply aware that, on one level at least, my informants were not only talking to me – they were also talking, that is, interrogating, themselves. In view of this fact, I propose that giving testimony is not only a kind of autobiography but also a kind of auto-confession (see Mosse 2006). Foucault is helpful here in distinguishing two different but ‘deeply and closely connected’ forms of confession – the bodily renunciation of the self in *exomologesis* (Foucault 1993: 213) and the analytical and continuous verbalisation of

the self in *exagoreusis* (Foucault 1993: 220). More specifically, *exomologesis* is described as an episode of dramatic and penitent self-revelation that is undertaken in order to obtain reconciliation with the wider Christian community. Such acts are bodily punishments of the self, aiming at maximum theatricality to achieve somatic and symbolic expressions of the current state of defilement. As such, *exomologesis* does not aim to tell the truth about the sin, but aims to show the true being of the sinner and is thus not only a form of self-revelation, but is also said to be a form of self-destructive maceration (Foucault 1993: 215). *Exagoreusis*, on the other hand, centres not on the body but on a ceaseless examination of the ‘nearly imperceptible movements of the thoughts [and] the permanent mobility of the soul’ (Foucault 1993: 217). Importantly however, as with *exomologesis*, *exagoreusis* is still an act of explicit self-sacrifice, because, in continuously verbalising the self, the self is obligated to renounce all evil and thus the darkness contained within one’s will in order to achieve complete (*self-destructive*) union with God’s divine light (Foucault 1993: 220).

But how are these two concepts related to testimony? I will argue, by looking at the transcript that follows, that the performance of ‘giving testimony’ can be seen as a hybrid of the confessional methodologies of *exomologesis* and *exagoreusis*, uniting, as it does, both word and body through a ‘tell all’ verbalisation of religious (Riis and Woodhead 2010) and somatic (Lyon and Barbalet 1994) emotion.

‘It’s emotional, you ken’

Alasdair: In the area that I come from, everybody knows me and everybody knows the change in my life... Alasdair can now walk past every pub. I’ve never been **[voice breaks]**... since that day that I said I would never drink again to my wife, I’ve never put any alcohol of any kind to my lips and never will. All I drink now is water. When I got saved, I says [to my brother], “ken this, I never thought I’d see the day that I would be a saved man”. And he says “but we all seen it coming” **[begins to weep]**. **[Silence]**. Praise the Lord for that, ken what I mean? ... I would say I was a spiritual man...[break in recording as someone comes into the room].

JW: You just said you were a spiritual man... how would you describe to a non-Christian what you just said?

Alasdair: Well I'm just gonna tell you. When I came to the Lord and the night that I gave my heart to the Lord, and accepted him as my saviour **[begins to weep]**... he put Jesus in my heart. He put Jesus in my heart, and he's still there, all this years... and I know what Jesus saved me from: he saved me from the drink, saved me from using bad language. He changed me and if you knew me 35 years ago you would see the change in my life... If there's no change, there's no change, if you don't see nothing, there's no change, but people know that I have changed because I've got Jesus in my heart. When I gave my life to the Lord I accepted him as my saviour. He put Jesus in my heart and it's as fresh today as the day I was baptised and I'll tell you something: I could get baptised every week, that's how much it means to me **[begins to weep again]**.

'Giving testimony' acts to make sense of the self by making sense of change. Alasdair stressed to me that he was a changed man and everybody knew him as such. By narrating the self in terms of transformation – being saved from drink and bad language and being given a new heart for Jesus – change wrought upon the self comes to be defined not only as essential ('if there's no change, there's no change') but also as social. Change, then, is made intelligible by sharing it, by providing what Foucault refers to in *exagoreusis* as an 'analytical and continuous verbalisation of... thought' (Foucault 1993:221). It is shared through the very act of giving testimony – by telling one's story; by confessing; by giving one's spiritual autobiography.

Yet it is important to note the wider context of more 'ordinary' and 'secular' reminiscence that these born again testimonials are situated within. Strolling along the Gamrie seafront I would almost invariably bump into some of the older men from the churches walking and talking together about the glories of days gone by. I remember on one particular occasion meeting a man from the Kirk who was walking alone and seemed glad of someone to 'muse awa to'. We very quickly settled to talking about the past with him telling me how 'the village is a different world to what it used to be'. He spoke about his childhood – how he had spent all his time outside playing with friends on the brae and

at the beach. They were nearly always happy, ‘nae like the bairns today’; they were always inside, complaining about how bored they were. He also lamented the disappearance of certain kinds of local knowledge: the creel fishermen had ‘names for every rock along the shore – all that’s gone now. This was our world – we never left as bairns, maybe once a year for a trip to Fraserburgh, *but that was it!* Now people are fleein’ aboot in cars all the time!’ The results were clear for all to see – the shops were gone, the school roll was down and the churches were emptying. ‘We was poor but we was happy!’ he told me with a sad expression. ‘Still, that’s just it’, he said with a resigned tone, and we walked on.

The ‘secular’ reminiscences of how village life had changed acted to invert the linguistic ideology of local conversion narratives: where ‘giving testimony’ was typically a story that moved from ‘spiritual darkness’ into ‘God’s glorious light’, reminiscing about Gamrie’s past was almost exclusively focused on change for the worse. Even poverty was seen to be a blessing of the past and prosperity the curse of today: ‘prosperity ruined this village – folk got money from the fishin’ and noo they’ve nae needa God, or so they *think*’. Change, made known through reminiscence, was said to be everywhere – ‘*things hiv completely, completely changed!*’ was a common local phrase. But as I argue below, reminiscence about this type of socio-spiritual change ‘out there in the world’ was not deemed to be a sufficient marker of born again personhood. What mattered most, in classic Protestant terms, was what local Christians called ‘the condition of the heart’.

Testifying to ‘real’ change – to return to my earlier point about Christian conversion as a discontinuity (Robbins 2007) that nevertheless stems from a pre-existent linguistic ideology – involves a process of ‘inner’ rebirth (‘He put Jesus in my *heart*’) that brings about ‘exterior’ transformation (‘I know what Jesus saved me *from*’). More than this, such a process of change – such a move towards discontinuity – is intelligible to the other (remember Alasdair’s brother commenting ‘but we all seen it coming’) exactly because discontinuity is a shared experience with a shared history, that is, the discontinuity of conversion, as performed through the standardised practice of giving testimony, is recognisable precisely because it draws upon a pre-existent linguistic ideology.

Coleman, who calls this process ‘narrative emplacement’ (2000: 119), gives further insightful context on this point. Drawing upon Stromberg (1993), he states that:

Part of gaining identity in a congregation or Bible School is the development and constant honing of a personal account of conversion, depicting how one became born-again into a new life... [effecting] the *integration of a shared religious language* into the idiosyncratic details of the person’s life history (Coleman 2000:119. Emphasis added).

As with Harding’s (2000) view of conversion as involving the adoption of a specific kind of religious language, Coleman shows us that conversion is not only a personal matter of the ‘heart’ but is also eminently social – it is about the gaining of an identity within a community, be it ‘in a congregation or Bible School’ (Coleman 2000: 119), and, additionally for Alasdair, within the circles of family, work and leisure. We see in this wider ethnographic context of ‘giving testimony’ both continuity and discontinuity. Continuity is marked by the giving of a narrative within an existing linguistic tradition, which, by the very fact that it has a shared syntactic history that demarcates the ‘unthought categories of thought’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:40), is also a linguistic ideology. However, we also see discontinuity in Alasdair’s insistence that he is a changed man – he mentions change no less than six times in three lines of transcript. And if we are not to subsume everything he says under the rubric of ‘ideology’ then we need also to retain some focus on his claims about the change that has been wrought in his life.

By narrating change in one’s own life, change is not only shared and therefore social, but also becomes an index of commitment. By giving up drinking and swearing, Alasdair was making a direct claim to Christian commitment: ‘everybody knows me and everybody knows the change in my life... Alasdair can now walk past every pub’. A committed Christian is a Christian who makes certain kinds of self-sacrifices – they give up, as I argued in Chapter III, the ‘sinful lusts of the flesh’. Real change is self-sacrificial change, and self-sacrificial change is ‘committed’ change. The similarity here with Robbins’ (2004) theory of morality and cultural change is striking:

It is as a domain of conscious deliberation and considered action that the moral takes on a special role in the processes of cultural change. Put most simply, because the moral

domain is a conscious one, it is also the one in which the fact of change is most likely consciously to register for those involved in it (Robbins 2004: 316).

Where the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea have experienced rapid Christianisation while still retaining many of their other ‘original’ social institutions, it seems, at first glance, that the ethnographic context that Robbins is working in is so different from my own that any comparison would be fruitless. Could these remote hunter gatherers from Papua New Guinea have anything in common with a retired fisherman from northeast Scotland? I actually think so insofar as what Alasdair was bearing witness to in his own life – that of the spiritual transformation of being ‘born again’ – is strikingly similar to what the Urapmin were telling Robbins about their own religious conversion. Thus, to the extent that Robbins’ ethnography examines how the Urapmin ‘recognise and confront the problems of working with two cultures at once’ (Robbins 2004: 316), I want to argue that a similar problem is being faced daily by those who told me their testimony, that is, they confronted the problem of personal and social change. Remember how for Alasdair, you can tell if someone is born again on the basis of the evidence of a transformed life:

Alasdair: If there’s no change, there’s no change, if you don’t see nothing, there’s no change, *but people know that I have changed* because I’ve got Jesus in my heart.

So change is important. Being born again necessitates a real shift, that is, a movement from ‘continuity’ to ‘discontinuity’ (Robbins 2004. See also Keller 2005: 241). This shift is made known through a change in morality – just as Robbins suggested. What did Alasdair mean when he said ‘if there’s no change then there’s no change’? He meant that if there is no visible moral change in your life then there has been no (in)visible ‘spiritual’ change in your soul – and there *had* been just such a change for Alasdair. He had stopped swearing and drinking, he had become a ‘proper family man’; he talked differently; he spent his leisure time differently; he made the transition from the pub to the church. And while it is true to say that Robbins’ informants were ‘working with two cultures at once’ (Robbins 2004: 316) and my informants were clearly not, the point still

remains: change, be it ‘macro’ cultural change or more ‘micro’ lifestyle change, can still be firmly located in the sphere of the moral.

Yet even narrating this kind of moralistic self-sacrificial change is not enough within this autobiographical method of confession. Confession needs not only to be shared, but shared in a certain kind of way. As well as the need for the ‘continuous verbalisation’ of *exagoreusis* (Foucault 1993: 221), we also have, if the Christian is to be seen to be interrogating themselves with sincerity, the need for what Foucault calls the ‘maximum theatricality’ (Foucault 1993: 214) of *exomologesis*. I am speaking here of the bodily expression of emotion:

Alasdair: I couldna come out my bedroom this morning without speaking to my Lord. If I didnae have Jesus with me just noo I couldnae speak to you. But I know that’s he’s.... **[weeping]** ... he made me into something else – took me back, took me into the church and used me... I always think back to my days in the Sunday school... it’s a promise of the Lord’s that he will never leave you... and its true **[begins to weep again]**. Its emotional, you ken, with me, I mean, I’m a strong man, dinna get me wrong, I’m a powerful man, I stand up to anything, ken, but when I’m speaking about my Lord, I cry. But I look at the great men in the Bible: Jesus wept, David cried, you know what I mean, all the great men in the Bible all wept. Jesus... **[beings to weep]**... The thing is, when I’m praying, I cry a lot, and it’s Jesus, what he did for me. He went to that cross, he could have come down from that, but he didna bend... went to that cross lonely and he died for me and you and that blood spilled... **[crying, unable to finish sentence]**. The cross was where it started and that blood was poured out for you and me, ken... I think the cross is the most important [thing]. That was the plan of God for my life... he knew us before we was born **[continues crying]**. Is that nae great? I think it’s great... I dinna ken how I’d live my life without the Lord... he’s been so much in my life this last years ken, it’s been a great comfort to me, a great comfort.

One thing to note from this section of the transcript is the way in which Alasdair seems to be inverting, in a particular religious context, certain local expectations of what it means to be a man. Anyone who has seen clips from the BBC television series ‘*Trawlermen*’

(Jones *et al.* 2007) will be well aware of the kind of masculinity that is dominant among the crews of the Fraserburgh fishing fleet. Words like ‘arduous’, ‘endurance’, ‘bravery’, ‘resilience’ and ‘danger’ (all of which are used to sell *Trawlermen Series 1* on DVD) seem to be more common than do words such as ‘emotional’, ‘wept’, ‘cry’ and ‘comfort’ used by Alasdair when describing his love for Jesus. Yet Alasdair had been a fisherman most of his life and also describes himself as ‘strong’ and ‘powerful’. This forces us to ask about the broader context of emotion at work here. It seems clear that while testimony is a highly ordered performance that exists to reproduce predictable forms of narrative, it is, of course, also a social performance and one that seems to play with social expectations in interesting ways:

Alasdair: Ken this, I’ll always remember my granny... me and her would be sitting there and my grandfather and father would be away to sea... [and] she would always say the same thing every night – “I’m praying for you the night”. **[Breaks down in tears, unable to speak]**. [long silence]. It never leaves you, never leaves you.... For all them that’s heard the gospel and their parents has prayed for them and everything and them that has nae responded, where are they going? [Silence. Waiting for an answer]. Where are they going Joe?

JW: Well, they are lost.

Alasdair: They’re *lost*. It’s like somebody falling into the harbour, throwing them a life belt and they will na take... If you go to church every week of your life or ten times a day, read your Bible and everything, but there’s no change, if you dinna have Jesus in your heart... **[starts to weep again]** you’ve got to have that Holy Spirit. Without that Holy Spirit we are lost, we are lost, I mean, the day I gave my life to Jesus I felt the Holy Spirit going into my heart, I really did, *in there* [points to heart]. **[crying]**: Great. Still there. Still there... **[continues crying]**. Will we have a word of prayer?

JW: I was just going to say... do you want me to turn this [dictaphone] off?

Alasdair: **[Weeping]**: Ay, turn it off.

[Interview ends]. [Alasdair begins to pray].

How can a man weep uncontrollably into a dictaphone while talking about his total dependence on ‘the Lord’ whilst also maintaining an equally sincere claim to being a strongly masculine fisherman? Where Alasdair broke down into tears on more than a dozen occasions during an interview that lasted just over an hour, it is worth remembering that such a display of emotion was made all the more remarkable by the fact that it was given by a ‘hardened fisherman’ in front of a student forty years his junior who was assumed to be a total stranger to the ‘hard graft’ of ‘real men’s work’. Alasdair’s weeping, his broken voice, and, at times, his outright crying only makes sense, then, when we consider it not simply as a specific kind of somatic auto-confession, but also within its boarder context of emotional enskilment. Given the fact that Alasdair, James, Alec and Jim represented a fairly specific sub-section of my wider ‘research population’, it is important to note how several different factors seem to be coming together here. Specifically, all these informants were men, all were from northeast Scotland, all were retired fishermen, and all, being in their sixties and early seventies, were from the same generation. The ‘broader context’, then, seems to concern these four demographic factors. I want to consider each in turn.

In terms of gender, it was the case locally that all those who ‘went to sea’ (like all those who preached) were men. This was no accident. I often saw men joking with their wives about the impossibility of a woman working at sea; women were said to be particularly vulnerable to seasickness, not capable of living in the cramped, dirty environment of the boat, and crucially, not physically strong enough to cope with the heavy labour nor emotionally strong enough to cope with the verbal banter. Locally, men and women were held to be physical and spiritual opposites, in terms of both capability and role – where women were seen as lacking, men were held to be able, and vice versa. If one were to add to all of this that seeing a woman when leaving the harbour was traditionally deemed to bring ‘bad luck’ (Anson 1930) to a fishing trip, then one begins to understand the broader context of the kind of hyper-masculinity commonly found on board the trawlers. (Historically, the partial exception to this was the ‘herring lassies’ (figs. 23-24) who, generally being the wives of fishermen, followed the fleet, gutting the herring the men

brought ashore. Although a vital part of the fishing industry at this time, these women were still held to be bad luck and never allowed onto the boats themselves).



Fig. 23: Herring Gutters, Fraserburgh, 1930s (BM&HA 2009)



Fig. 24: Herring Filleting Display, Gamrie Gala, 2009

In terms of nationality, these men – and many other informants – often spoke to me of how the national character of Scots was defined by their being ‘hardy’ and ‘stoic’ folk who were able to put up with considerable hardship and poverty. Being reserved and very private people were traits also said to mark most Scots. Fishermen of other nationalities were discussed when making (almost always unfavourable and occasionally racist) comparisons with Scots fishermen – Irish fishermen were stupid, Latvian fishermen were violent drunks, Filipino fishermen could not cope with the cold and Ghanaian fishermen were arrogant, and, worst of all, lazy. Such were the character stereotypes I frequently heard.

In terms of occupation, the obvious challenges of working at sea were said to make the Scottish ‘character’ all the more ingrained. Additionally, those who worked as fishermen – and particularly those who had risen to skipper or ‘mate’³⁴ – were described to me in these testimonial interviews as ‘self made men’ who achieved success as a result of their own abilities and hard work. Where every man aspired to be ‘his own skipper’ who worked for no one but himself, it was also said to be the case that every fisherman sought, in more general terms, to be ‘no man’s debtor’, being dependent upon no one but themselves, not only financially, but also socially and emotionally. Such was the competitive nature of fishing.

In terms of generation, many of my informants were, if not elderly, then well into retirement, having grown up during the Second World War. Their children (now in their middle age) sometimes commented to me how this older generation remained overly private and closed off from others, including family members. ‘A lot of things simply weren’t talked about’ was a frequent assertion made by the current generation of working fishermen, most often in the context of discussing the ways in which their parents dealt with painful life experiences. It was emotional reserve, then, that was said to typify this older generation of fishermen.

Within the general context of emotional enskilment, the practice of ‘giving testimony’ seems to permit an inversion of much of what was said to typify the character and

³⁴ Skipper’s mate; second in command.

temperament of the Scottish fisherman. ‘Strong’ and ‘powerful’ men known for the ‘cut and thrust’ of their verbal banter became overcome with emotion, weeping publicly. Scots said to be marked by stoicism and hardiness freely voiced their daily need for the ‘comfort’ and ‘reassurance’ of ‘their Lord’. Fishermen usually marked by a competitive and fiercely independent spirit spoke of their utter dependence upon God as their ‘saviour’ and ‘provider’. A generation said to be marked by a strong sense of reserve and privacy constantly sought out opportunities to share their ‘testimony’ with others – including relative strangers with dictaphones – in unprecedented expressions of emotional openness. In sum, the ‘ideal type’ of what made a good fisherman found its inversion in the ritual act of ‘giving testimony’: men became emotionally ‘feminine’; Scots became as ‘soft’ as ‘English incomers’; independent competitors became spiritual dependants; a reserved generation became open and expressive.

Giving an emotionally enskiled testimony meant giving a ‘sincere’ performance where the body (crying eyes and trembling hands) and the spoken word (urgent proclamation and rhetorical questioning) were conflated to the point of being consubstantiated into a single form, rendering the search for an additional (‘uniquely emergent’) narrative a nonsense to local people. As a result, the question of insincerity simply became a question of whether or not the right performance was being given. Insincere performances were not ‘false-hearted’ or ‘double minded’ but simply incorrect. Insincerity was not imagined to use the (exterior) body to mask (interior) words – as if ‘crocodile tears’ could hide the ‘real’ state of the soul – but was rather attributed to actions that improperly performed an already known state of being. In this sense, had Alasdair’s crying produced tears of bitter anger rather than tears of joyful devotion, his testimony, like Amery Moran’s self-righteous sermonising, would have been deemed a performative failure. Within the specific context of giving testimony, emotion indexed and substantiated sincerity. Alasdair’s spiritual condition – his ‘heart’, in his own terms – was laid bare for all to see by its being consubstantiated with his bodily display of emotion. Alasdair, choking through tears, said to me: ‘I felt the Holy Spirit going into my heart, *I really did, in there*’. In this sense, emotion indexes sincerity (the ‘really real’) through the process of giving a testimony that conforms to the *exomologesis* of autobiographical confession.

Sick or slick?

Testimony, as an interrogation of the self by the self, is a kind of penitential rite that exists, through the public display of bodily emotion, as a way of achieving ‘martyrdom’ (Foucault 1993: 215). This is especially true within the self revelatory *exomologesis* of testimony where giving a ‘tell all’ answer to the question ‘how did you become a Christian?’ necessitates a kind of self destruction. The point was not so much that Alasdair’s display of emotion was telling some truth about the moment of his conversion (as a bounded event), but rather that it performed, in word and body, his ‘general status in... existence’ (Foucault 1993: 213) as a born-again believer by engaging in a verbal and somatic reiteration of his converted status. Alasdair performed, through the ‘maximum theatricality’ (Foucault 1993: 214) of his emotional testimony, that he was broken, empty, bankrupt and penitent, and on this basis alone, he became nothing more (and nothing less) than ‘a sinner saved by grace’. In this ‘refusal’ of the self (Foucault 1993: 215) Alasdair unmade himself through the ‘tell all’ of his exhaustive spiritual history. By weeping his way through his testimony – which represented a continuous and embodied verbalisation of thought (Foucault 1993: 219) – Alasdair achieved an almost perfect ‘renunciation’ (Foucault 1993: 215) of the self, (‘...its *nothing* to do with me, it’s the *Lord*, that’s the way *He* works...’), and in so doing, achieved what testimonies and autobiography surely have in common: ‘the revelation of the truth about oneself’ (Foucault 1993: 221).

What is more, such revelation was not a one off event but was achieved through the constant reiteration of autobiographical statements: ‘I was born...’, ‘I got married...’, ‘I got saved...’ and so forth. Crucially, reiteration is not simply a statement – in this sense it is not pure avowal – but is also performative, that is, reiteration of one’s testimony actually constitutes the ‘truth’ of the experience of conversion. By reiterating the ‘conversion tale’ through the act of ‘giving testimony’, the personhood of the born-again Christian is not just restated but also re-enacted. What we have then is a persistent renewal of belief, not as acquiescence to a series of conceptual propositions, but as an embodiment of the ‘truth’ of the committed Christian self through this ‘maximum theatricality’ (Foucault 1993: 214) of confessional autobiography.

But the ethnography presented in this chapter so far might give rise in the reader's mind to a sense that what we are dealing with here in Alasdair's 'testimony' is not a generally coherent statement of confessional autobiography but a display of religious emotion that is actually rather pathological. Might Alasdair not just be sick? Two responses seem to be required here. First, I want to suggest that Alasdair's testimony is not a symptom of sickness but arises out of an established and locally coherent linguistic ideology that seeks to make sense of the self and religious change through the medium of an emotional testimony. Second, I want to argue that the very fact that it occurs to us to ask the question, 'is Alasdair, on the basis of his emotional testimony, sick?' is itself highly informative of the way in which the social sciences have had (at least in the past) a tendency to view Christianity not as an internally coherent cultural phenomena in its own right, but instead as a rather awkward addendum to the somehow more continuous particularities of other spheres of human culture and experience (Robbins 2007; Keller 2007).

If we are happy then to concede that Alasdair, in giving his testimony, was not straightforwardly deranged in his display of emotion, could he perhaps, as another colleague put to me, be seen as 'theatrically slick' rather than presenting as 'sick'? In other words, could all that weeping be little more than crocodile tears – a kind of emotional blackmail that had my conversion and not Alasdair's confession as its design? How can we know that Alasdair was not being insincere? What is most striking here is not any answer that there might be to this question, but again, the very fact that we might feel the need to ask the question in the first place. This is the case because in asking it we again betray a typically Protestant interest (Keane 2002; see also Cannell 2005, Robbins 2003, Sahlins 1996) in discovering the 'really real' (or 'uniquely emergent') 'truth' of the event that was Alasdair's conversion. All I can do here is point the reader back to Foucault's (1993: 213) assertion that Christian confession (and thus 'giving testimony' as confessional autobiography) is not about eliciting the truth of a single event (i.e. 'what's *really* going on, *deep down*, on the *inside*') but about performing and thereby constituting the truth of a more general state of existence, in our case, of the 'soul state' of the born again believer. This returns us to our point about the persistence of the renewal of belief, because, what is going on in 'giving testimony' is not just a description of a past salvific

experience, but rather a (re)making of that experience. Thus, rather than ask ourselves ‘was Alasdair telling the truth about his past or was he rather demonstrating illness or perhaps even deception?’ we should ask ‘how is Alasdair’s performance of testimony actually constituting the truth of his salvation in the present?’

But to leave the emphasis of my analysis here, so firmly placed on the self, would be to miss something important, namely, the way in which confessional autobiography is also ‘fundamentally’ a relational phenomena that allows the act of ‘giving testimony’ to constitute the truth of the experience of salvation in the present. Thus, where confession is about establishing the truth about oneself, this is not the only thing going on in confession. Confession is also a social relationship. Ordinarily, making one’s confession requires a priest, but in many cases (outside the strict limits set by the Church) it can involve a parent, a friend, a stranger and so on. It can also, apparently, involve an anthropologist. What is important is that it ordinarily involves someone other than the one doing the confessing. Crucially, it is through this ‘other’ that the truth about oneself is made known – the confessing, testifying self is knowable through the participation of an audience, be it a crowd or a single listening ear. The effect is the same; it is through the listening ear (and also, surely, the watchful eye) of the audience that the truth about oneself is deemed (and thereby rendered) sincere or insincere.

By having a weekly ‘testimony’ at the Gamrie Kirk youth club, then, part of the purpose of this speech act was surely that, by virtue of having others listen, the person who stood to speak had the ‘realness’ of their salvation affirmed, by both the self and the hearing other. Giving one’s testimony in public for the first time, then, becomes almost another moment of conversion – as the ‘truth’ of the salvation of Danny’s soul comes to be publicly recognised and established – much like the pre-existent love of a husband and wife is imagined, locally, to be established through the giving and receiving of vows during a public marriage ceremony in the presence of many ‘witnesses’. Unlike marriage, however, conversion is not imagined as a ‘once and only’ act of commitment, indeed, the ‘marriage vows’ of conversion are taken over and over again by ‘giving testimony’ in the presence of a congregation of listening ‘witnesses’. Hence Alasdair’s emotion – his sincerity was made known through his embodied emotional enskilment, that is, it was

constituted by his facial expression, tears, trembling hands and broken voice. His sincerity was sincere because he gave the right kind of emotional performance and received the right kind of response from his listeners, be they an anthropologist with a dictaphone or, as in Danny's case, an entire congregation of 'unsaved' weeping 'sinners'.

Conclusions

Giving one's testimony then, just as making one's confession, is not only a revelation of the truth of oneself by the self, nor is it simply a free exchange with another (whoever that may be). Rather, it is also an intentional interaction with that other. This is crucial. Confessors and testifiers want not only a listening ear but also a responsive 'heart'. Where confessors of sin want to be met with a heart of forgiveness, those who testify to being born again want to be met with a heart of repentance – they want their testimony to move the listener in such a way as to change the state of their soul. Giving testimony (both in public and in private) was seen by my informants as a kind of 'Christian service'; Alasdair constantly sought to 'share something of his testimony' with those who were not locally recognised as being born again, thereby fulfilling his mission in life to 'speak to as much people as I can... [about] the Lord', because in so doing, he not only testified 'to the saving power of the Holy Spirit', but actually enacted it, both in word and in body.

Testimonies are spoken with the intention of moving the hearer emotionally to act in a certain way. Because I labelled myself as a committed Christian during my fieldwork, I had the sense that Alasdair was unsure not of my 'salvation' but of my personal 'commitment' to the faith that I claimed. So what did Alasdair want from me in return for sharing his testimony? He wanted to 'win back my soul', that is, he wanted to bring me to greater Christian commitment. Alasdair, in sharing his testimony, was trying to make me into the kind of Christian he wanted me to be. His performance was not only for himself – it was not an act of pure *auto*-biography nor was it spiritual solipsism – it was also a deliberate act of evangelism; Alasdair was calling me to commit myself to the spiritual path that he himself had committed to.

Crucially this did not make his 'auto-confession' insincere. His body testified to the fact that he was genuinely (and personally) moved by the emotional experience of retelling his conversion narrative and he did 'lose' himself in the account several times where he appeared to be speaking not to me, but to himself. Such is the (somatic and discursive) complexity of 'giving testimony' that we can (and must) point to several things going on at once in any given performance. Alasdair was 'moved', then, not only by himself and for himself; he was also moved on my behalf, and this, out of a desire to see me (that is, my soul) 'challenged', 'renewed', 'refreshed', and 'encouraged' by being brought to a fuller life of faith and repentance. It is in this sense that testimony, as well as being an autobiographical confession, can also be said to be an act of witness. Alasdair was moved on my behalf and sought, in turn, to move me through the retelling of his testimony. Hence his pointed question right at the end of the interview: 'For all them that's heard the gospel and... has nae responded, where are they going? Where are they going Joe?' It was in that moment of awkward silence that it suddenly dawned on me that Alasdair was not simply telling me his testimony, he was also trying to call me to greater Christian commitment. 'Well, they are lost', I said, offering the answer I knew was expected. 'They're *lost*', Alasdair nodded through tears:

'It's like somebody falling into the harbour, throwing them a life belt and they will na take it... If you go to church... ten times a day, read your Bible and everything, but there's no change, if you dinna have Jesus in your heart... we are lost'.

And after just a few more words, Alasdair finished giving his testimony, the tape recorder was off and he was praying through yet more tears that I would receive God's guidance and blessing.

In giving a close 'reading' of one man's testimony I have argued for four main points. First, 'testimony', is a 'tell all' narrative of the self by the self, that is, testimony is a kind of autobiographical interview. Second, despite the fact that these conversion tales are indeed marked by a strong degree of structural similarity (and are thus artefacts of ideology), this does not indicate that they are insincere 'surface' narratives designed to

conceal what is ‘really’ going on in the life of the believer. Rather, because conversion is not only conversion to a religion but also to a language (Harding 2000: 34; Coleman 2000: 119) it is through this ideological structure (or ‘cultural script’) that the self is known and made knowable. Third, the genre of testimony is intimately linked to Christian confession and can be helpfully (if only partially) illuminated by a bringing together of Foucault’s notions of *exagoreusis* and *exomologesis* (Foucault 1993). Fourth, far from being pure *auto*-biography, testimony needs to be understood as a quintessentially social act in so far as it is also an act of witness, that is, it is part of a larger programme of evangelism that seeks to bring about a transformation in the spiritual life of the hearer. Having discussed the life of one particular retired fisherman, let us move to consider the lives of those who still work at sea – not only in terms of the material labour of trawling for prawns, but also in terms of the spiritual labour that surrounds being a ‘fisher of men’.

Chapter V

Fishing

The fishermen inhabiting the eastern coasts of the north of Scotland have ever had peculiarities of social life belonging to their own class... [with] the habits of one generation fall[ing] naturally upon that of the succeeding. [...] The man who ventures from day to day on the briny deep must have mental courage combined with physical strength. [...] A thorough-bred fisherman is distinguished by attributes – moral, mental, and physical.

(Thomson 1849: 173-174)

There are two important factors which have always played a great part in the lives of the fisher folk of the east coast of Scotland as in most other seafaring communities, i.e. religion and superstition. [...] Religion counts for so much in the lives of the Scottish fisher folk, that to understand them and their outlook on life this must never be forgotten.

(Anson 1930: 37, 47)

This chapter, like the two preceding it, is about the enchanting power of words. Having already discussed the enchanting power of preaching and testimony (as both spoken and heard), our final chapter in this section on words attempts to bring both of these practices together, but within the very different context of the deep sea prawn fishery. Importantly, insofar as it takes as its frame the life and work of two different deep sea fishing crews in northeast Scotland, this chapter is also about boats, bodies, prawns and water – after all, as Thomson tells us, a ‘thorough-bred fishermen’ is knowable not only in ‘moral’ and ‘mental’ terms, but also with regards to the physicality of their own ‘strength’ and that of the ‘briny deep’ (Thomson 1849: 173-174). Equally, as Anson insists, this chapter is also necessarily about religion. It will be my argument throughout the chapter that the physical labour of trawling for prawns in the North Sea is directly analogous to the ‘spiritual labour’ of evangelistic ‘witness’. Further, the distinction I made in Chapter III between ‘preaching the gospel’ (to the ‘unsaved’) and ‘teaching the Bible’ (to the

‘saved’) will also be deployed in this chapter as a way of showing how ‘spiritual labour’ is not pure evangelism, being also inclusive of the work of ‘encouraging’ and ‘equipping’ committed Christians who find themselves cut off from their churches and meeting halls while out at sea.

I argue this by dividing the chapter up into four sections – two ethnographic and two theoretical. First, I present an ethnographic account of my time working on the *Flourish* (figs. 25-40), a prawn trawler fishing out of Fraserburgh. Second, I analyse this ethnographic data by suggesting that evangelistic witness (what I refer to as both ‘trawling for souls’ and being a ‘fisher of men’) like trawling for prawns, needs to be understood as a competitive ‘zero-sum game’ (Johnson 1979). Third, I present a further section of ethnography, this time of my trip on the Fraserburgh-based prawn trawler the *Celestial Dawn* (figs. 41-45). Fourth, I analyse this data by drawing on Pálsson’s (1994) notion of ‘enskilment’ but apply it not so much to the corporeal skill of ‘getting one’s sea legs’, but rather to the linguistic skill of ‘witnessing’ to one’s fellow crew.

Both trips to sea took place during my last winter in the field and lasted six days each. During this time I worked (and was paid) as a trainee deckhand as we fished for prawns in the North Sea 100 miles east of Fraserburgh, roughly half way between the shores of Scotland and Norway. Both trips were arranged informally with skippers local to Gamrie and at very short notice. Both skippers were committed Christians and organised their entire working life around never being at sea on Sunday (traditionally leaving Sunday midnight and returning Saturday dawn). The skipper of the *Flourish*, called Zander, was a member Gamrie’s FPCU. The skipper of the *Celestial Dawn*, Georgie Sr., was a member of Gamrie’s OB. Both boats usually had a crew of around six people, some of whom called themselves (‘born-again’) Christians and some of whom very pointedly did not. Crew members would typically earn around £1000 a week, sometimes more, sometimes less, and were paid on a share basis as opposed to a straight wage. Skippers, (who were usually also boat owners) earned considerably more; the vast majority were reputed to be millionaires. The *Flourish* had an entirely Scottish crew whereas the *Celestial Dawn* employed two Filipinos through an agency based in Manila. These men lived on board the boat and told me they were paid about £100 a week plus discretionary bonuses. The

hours for both skipper and crew were long (sometimes upwards of 100 hours in six days) and the holidays few, with some men taking as few as two weeks off in a year.

First Trip: The Flourish, September 2009



Fig. 25: Flourish BF 340 (Simple Machines 2008)

Zander, the skipper of the boat, picked me up in his jeep at ‘the bog’ (the bottom of the village) at about ten o’clock on Sunday night. With me I had a sleeping bag and pillow, a few changes of clothes, my Nikon D40 and two packets of ‘Stugeron’ anti-sickness tablets. I was standing in a wrecked pair of trainers, a cheap pair of jogging bottoms, a synthetic fleece jumper and an old terracotta orange rain coat that was several sizes too big. I looked (and felt) not like a fisherman, but like a total fraud. And I could not stop thinking about being sea sick.



Fig. 26: Leaving Fraserburgh harbour

We left the harbour at about 11pm in the pitch black. It was slightly choppy as we went through the harbour itself but the boat started to roll an awful lot more the second we left the harbour walls. Just a few minutes before we set off, Zander's father smiled wryly and told me to take a plastic bag to bed. Once onboard, I was shown my bed and told how to wedge myself between my bag and the bunk to stop my body bouncing off the walls as I tried to sleep. I was then told where the life jackets were – stuffed into an unused bunk – in case we ever needed them. Next I was taken up into the wheel house to have a look around. Despite the fact that total blackness surrounded the boat, the wheel house itself was lit up like a Christmas tree – panel after panel of switches and buttons, as well as six lit up monitors all giving different information about the location of the vessel in relationships to the oil rigs and other boats, the water depth, wind speed and direction, the plots of past trawls, and on and on. What struck me as most odd was the fact that as well as several computers and monitors, there was also Sky TV in the wheel house – a little bit of luxury in the midst of so much bewildering technology.



Fig. 27: Zander in his wheelhouse

Zander was radioing other boats when I climbed the ladder through the hatch into the wheelhouse. He was trying to find out ‘fit likes the fishin?’ by getting important information from other skippers about ‘where the bonnie prawns is at’, and crucially, ‘fit size and weight of haul’ were they getting? He knew all the boats by name and they all knew him. The Fraserburgh fleet was fairly small and was further broken down into several cliques that, at times, shared information about catch sizes and locations. Soon enough Zander and I were chatting about ‘all the rules that the EU had recently brought in’. We spoke about the problems with the quota system and the new CCTV system that was designed to try and document (and thus reduce) ‘throwbacks’³⁵.

As we chatted we could begin to see some dots of light appearing a way off in the distance. Zander explained how he could tell how far ahead the boats were and which direction they were steaming in just by looking at their configuration of lights. To me they just looked like blobs of light in a mass of darkness. After a while Zander went to his bed and his brother John took over the watch. Interestingly, the conversation very quickly turned to Christian things. John told me he worshiped at the AoG in Fraserburgh

³⁵ Where perfectly fresh and saleable fish come up in the nets dead but must be thrown back to sea because the boat does not have the required licence and/or quota to land and sell the species in question.

and was soon to go away on a mission trip to Ghana. He spoke of a man at his church who had received a vision from God of an African girl reading a children's Bible to her illiterate mother. John went on to tell me that since receiving this vision, the man had gone on to distribute thousands of children's Bibles across Africa. Then, seemingly out of the blue, John turned to me and said 'I think God sent you here this week for me'. Perhaps noting my surprise, he began to explain. He himself was a skipper and was waiting for his own boat to be built. His family had been teasing him all week: "You're just a dekkie³⁶, you're just a dekkie!" saying that he wouldn't survive the physical labour, which, he admitted, he had been dreading. Yet he was encouraged, he said, speaking of the difference it would make to have me – a fellow Christian – on board while working at the tray.

No sooner had John finished describing how I had been sent to him by God to help him get through the week long trip, had he flicked on the Sky TV and started surfing through the Christian channels, coming to an abrupt stop when he reached UCB³⁷ which was showing an 'Answers in Genesis'³⁸ programme on scientific creationism. A cartoon picture of a mammoth flashed on screen with a text box as a footer. Seconds later another hand drawn diagram popped up, this time of the earth, suggesting what the tectonic configuration of the land would have looked like when they were all united as one mass³⁹. We chatted over the commentary provided for each picture and John quizzed me about my own beliefs on creationism and evolution. I was struck, as the conversation drifted from scientific creationism to denominational distinctives to beliefs about the end of the world, that I could have just as easily been having the same conversation back in Gamrie as opposed to 100 miles off the coast, half way to Norway. We spoke until 4am. I really did not want to go to my bed because the conversation was so 'exotic'. I was also worried about lying down in case it made me feel sick, but eventually I had to retire because I could not keep my eyes open. I was in bed till about 8am, when the call came to get up to shoot the gear. Not being used to sleeping flat on my back – a necessity to stop myself shifting around with the roll of the boat – I got almost no sleep. While I was worried about exhaustion, I was comforted by the fact that I still did not feel sick, so I kept taking the pills and told myself they must be working.

³⁶ A deckhand. Lowest and worst paid position on the boat after the cook.

³⁷ United Christian Broadcasters. A popular channel among many of my Christian informants.

³⁸ A creationist movement headed by Australian born Ken Ham. Answers in Genesis attempts to prove literal, six day, young earth, creationism through the use of scientific evidence.

³⁹ Used as evidence of a young earth and as an explanation for the dispersal of human populations across the globe starting from the Garden of Eden.

* * *

Throwing myself into the routine of work, I very quickly lost all track of time. Hauling the gear, dumping the catch in the hopper and shooting the gear out to sea again happened four times a day, round the clock. Apart from Zander, John and I, there were three other men on the boat – Iain, the engineer, Charlie the cook and Paul, an experienced deckhand, none of whom were Christians. While we all stood in a line along the tray tailing the prawns, Iain and Charlie kept trying to get John to sing us a hymn, which seemed odd at the time, but I later learned was probably just an attempt at killing the boredom of work. At one point Iain asked John what he thought about churches having gay ministers and John said he didn't think it was right. What about if one of his sons was gay – would he have thrown him out of the house? No he wouldn't. Would he be devastated? Yes, probably. 'There you go!!' cried Iain triumphantly in a mock show of victory, having established that, yes, Christians were all secret bigots.



Fig. 28: Paul hauling the gear



Fig. 29: John and Paul preparing to shoot the gear

John and Iain had a fair amount of religious banter, with Iain mostly playing offence and John stuck in defence. This verbal battle usually involved Iain throwing the occasional grenade John's way in between long silences of tailing prawns. Did he believe in evolution? No. Did he believe in dinosaurs? Yes. But did he believe that the bones were millions of years old? No. Why was there so much suffering in the world? Because of human sinfulness. And so it went on. At one point Zander came down from the wheel house to see how we were getting with clearing the backlog of prawns and quickly got stuck into the conversation. He leant over to Iain, Paul and I to explain how before sin entered the Garden of Eden there was no death – death, he said, was a product of the Fall. He went on to follow the logic through for us. If there was no sin in the garden before the fall, then there must have been no death, and if there was no death then all animals must have been vegetarian. He went on to describe how scientists had recently discovered the skull of a monkey with massive fangs. If you were to look at the skull, you would immediately think that the monkey was a meat eater, but this wasn't the case: research had shown that those large fangs were actually used to break into hard skinned fruit. Zander looked triumphant. Iain looked unconvinced. Paul looked uninterested. I felt a bit embarrassed. Eventually we all fell back to tailing the prawns.



Fig. 30: Iain, John, Paul and Charlie working at the tray

* * *

About halfway through a 10pm haul which was mostly full of useless herring, I had climbed into the hopper to haul out some more of the fish and prawns into the tray. As I raked away at another layer of live creatures packed into the solid wall of fish stacked up beside me, a large brown crab, legs flailing, tumbled out and landed right at my feet. I had been warned about these animals during our first haul – their claws are incredibly powerful and if they got hold of a finger, they could do some serious damage. Without even stopping to think I smashed its head with the flat end of the rake and pushed it onto the tray with the rest of the stuff to be sorted, jumping down to continue tailing. Paul, who was working opposite me, held up the sorry looking creature in front of me and said ‘Huh! Jesus Saves!’ before throwing it down one of the dump shoots, shaking his head and getting back to work. Suddenly Charlie struck up a merry little Sunday school tune: ‘All things bright and beautiful, Joe will kill them all’ as an ironic comment on my unnecessary cruelty.



Fig. 31: Joking at the tray

Seeing my embarrassment, John came to my rescue: ‘Ah, but when he goes to bed tonight, he’ll be *saved*’. I later realised that the brown crab and I were actually rather unimportant window dressing in a wider religious debate that had been going on between John on one side and Iain, Paul and Charlie on the other. The debate – about who went to heaven, who went to hell, and why – had been going on for years between the men in one form or another. The crab and I were just good to think with. As it turned out, it was a debate that would continue for the entire trip.

* * *

The next haul, we had what Charlie dubbed a ‘Bible study’ while we were sorting the catch. John told Iain how the Holy Spirit spoke to him personally as he prayed, read the Bible and went through daily life. Iain responded by asking – assuming the Adam and Eve story was true – how was the world populated without resorting to the sin of incest. It looked like John was going to crumble, so feeling the need to repay him for his earlier rescue, I came to his aid. I had heard it preached, I said, that it wasn’t a sin in those days because the genetic line was pure enough for incest not to cause deformities; God only decreed that incest was sinful when it became dangerous. This seemed to do the trick and John looked relieved.

Later on that night, at around 8pm, we had a full roast dinner and watched The Ten Commandments film on UCB. The situation struck me as altogether surreal: we were bobbing up and down in a small prawn trawler in the middle of the North Sea, eating a full roast dinner while watching Charlton Heston lead the Israelites out of the desert and into the Promised Land. During a lull in the action, Iain declared that he had been reading his Bible in between hauls (the fact that he had a Bible and took it with him to sea I found surprising), opening it at random and finding himself in the book of Leviticus. The passage he read was all about Mosaic laws against incest. He said that the Holy Spirit had not spoken to him in the way that John had experienced. Iain waited for a response but John did not say much.



Fig. 32: Charlie hauling the gear



Fig. 33: Zander releasing the catch into the hopper



Fig. 34: Charlie, Iain, Paul and Joe working at the tray



Fig. 35: John and Iain washing the catch to be stored in the hold



Fig. 36: Sending the catch down into the hold



Fig. 37: Packing the catch into iced boxes in the hold



Fig. 38: Charlie preparing food in the mess

Towards the end of the trip I was physically tired and started to struggle to do the work. My arms felt like lead and were very weak; my hands were stiff and slow; my feet were aching badly from standing on the grill, tailing for hours; my knees felt all bashed from climbing in and out of the hopper. During a breakfast of fried herring, in the middle of a conversation about how many boxes of prawns and fish we had stored away in the hold, a news clip about the discovery of a fossil that was 150 million years old flashed up. Iain immediately turned to John to see his reaction: he didn't believe it, saying how carbon dating wasn't accurate. Somehow, this led to an argument about a Christian skipper who kept the fridge in the mess locked: 'Why does he go all the way to Africa to build darkies hooses and won't even feed his *crew*?' Iain demanded angrily, going on: 'It's just for show: "Look at me, I'm a Christian"', at which point John got up from the table and walked out in protest. After a while, once John had come back into the mess and everyone had calmed down, we watched a bit more TV and then headed to our beds.

* * *

After a mid morning haul, we began cleaning the boat to prepare for landing the fish at market the next day. After a cup of tea in the mess John and I went down to the cabins to compare Bible translations. He showed me his NLT⁴⁰ and I showed him my ESV⁴¹. After he quizzed me on why I had chosen this version he decided he wanted an ESV too and said he would buy one when we got back on shore. Just as I was about to head to my bunk to get some sleep, John began to speak about his anxiety about going on the mission trip to Ghana. He said how a couple of nights ago he was feeling scared and could not sleep so he opened his Bible at a random page and began to read. The passage was Deuteronomy chapter one. As he read, he said that verses 29 and 31 really leapt out at him:

But I say to you, don't be shocked or afraid of them! ... And you saw how the Lord God cared for you all along the way as you travelled through the wilderness, just as a father cares for his child. Now he has brought you to this place.

⁴⁰ New Living Translation.

⁴¹ English Standard Version.

John then went on to describe how ‘comforting’ those words were and how he felt very ‘blessed’ by them. No sooner had we finished our conversation were we back in the mess debating with Iain, Charlie and Paul about whether or not Christians should be allowed to gamble. If a Christian were to be a contestant on ‘Who Wants to be a Millionaire?’ would they have to quit as soon as they were guaranteed a win of £1000 because anything beyond this would be gambling? I was exhausted and the religious debating did not look like it was going to stop, so eventually I excused myself and went to bed, leaving the others to their verbal jousting.

* * *

Our last haul of the trip was long and slow. Charlie and Paul really came into their own at this stage, dominating the conversation with really foul chat about ‘the turtle club’⁴². At one point they directed their attention to me and started to quiz me about my own sex life, leading to endless innuendo about both my landlady and my girlfriend. Suddenly Charlie looked at me almost apologetically and, referring to his earlier conversation with no double meaning intended, said ‘we really are wading through a stream of shit aren’t we?’ and excused himself by saying that dirty talk was the only way to pass the time. ‘John, sing us a hymn!’ he suddenly shouted, and before long we were singing along to our various ‘favourites’...

* * *

We arrived to land our catch in Fraserburgh around 5:30am on the Saturday. We unloaded the boxes of prawns onto the pier and into a truck that would take them to a market inland. The fish went straight to the market at the harbour. Fresh boxes were loaded, the boat was refuelled and the nets spread out on the pier and mended. As soon as I stepped back onto the pier, the ground started swaying beneath my feet to the point where I actually had to hold onto a stack of boxes to stop myself from falling over. Zander gave the crew a lift back to their various homes dropping me off last at the bottom of the Gamrie brae before finally heading home himself.

⁴² Supposedly involving binge drinking, eating curry and engaging in coprophilia.



Fig. 39: Zander and Paul unloading the catch onto the pier at Fraserburgh



Fig. 40: Mending the nets on the pier

When I got back I put my washing on, had a very long shower and went straight to bed. It was about 2 in the afternoon. I got a few hours sleep and, in the hope of sleeping through the night as well, set my alarm to get up for the evening prayer meeting at the Kirk. When I arrived at the church I was met by several of the older folk who were absolutely bursting to hear how I had got on at sea, particularly because the weather on shore had been awful. When they heard that I had not been sick they were all immensely relieved and reassured me over and over that they had been ‘praying for me *all week*’. ‘Someone was looking after you!’ they exclaimed, beaming from ear to ear; ‘the Lord has answered our prayers!’ And after answering lots of questions and telling a few stories we all bowed our heads and began to pray.

A ‘Zero-Sum Game’: Fishing and Witness as Competitive Labour

In an ethnographic account of conflict management in a Portuguese fishing village, Johnson (1979) argues:

The fishery can... be seen as a zero-sum game in which the success or failure of any one boat may affect the prospects of all the other boats. [...] It would be unreasonable for an individual boat to limit its effort; what it doesn’t catch will be left to others. [...] Thus it is not only to the advantage of individual boats to catch as much fish as they can, but there is some temptation to diminish the amount caught by others. Inter-boat conflict is... inevitable (Johnson 1979: 246).

The result, Johnson tells us, is ‘a social climate rife with secretiveness, lying, avoidance, and general suspicion’ (ibid.) between boats in the same fleet. In addition to Johnson, other nautical anthropologists such as Stiles (1972) writing on Newfoundland and Prattis (1973) writing on the Isle of Lewis have further suggested that such competition *between* boats leads to solidarity *within* individual crews. Their argument, concerned with the functional role of social conflict can be broadly summarised as follows:

Inter-boat conflict functions to *minimise incongruence* by creating *social solidarity* via *occupational status equivalence*⁴³.

⁴³ This is my own summary produced by synthesising Prattis’ (1973) interest in ‘incongruence’ and Stiles’ (1972) interest in ‘solidarity’ and ‘equivalence’.

The example of Gamrie, however, especially when an examination of fishing is conducted alongside that of religion, shows a more complex picture. Where Johnson (1979), Stiles (1972) and Prattis (1973) seem to assume that inter-boat conflict leads to intra-boat harmony, the ethnography presented above points to the occurrence of a rather different set of social relationships. To help show what these different social relationships look like and how they connect to the religion of Gamrie, my focus for the rest of the chapter will not be on inter-boat conflict but upon intra-crew verbal jousting. It will be my argument that:

Intra-crew verbal jousting functions to *maximise incongruence* by creating *social separation* via *salvific status differentiation*.

Crucially, where Johnson (1979), Stiles (1972) and Prattis (1973) examine the effect of inter-boat conflict on intra-crew solidarity, my focus will remain exclusively upon intra-crew relations. Such a focus is insightful insofar as inter-boat contact was limited and intra-crew verbal jousting was considerable. What is more, the subject of such banter was explicitly religious and the participants were divided on religious grounds that were rarely – if ever – crossed. Where the Christians ‘taught’ each other and ‘preached’ to their ‘unsaved’ crew members, the ‘non-Christians’ joked with each other and argued with their ‘saved’ crew members. This point is worth dwelling on for a moment.

Iain’s questions seemed incessant. What was wrong with gay ministers? Why couldn’t the earth be millions of years old? Why couldn’t Christians gamble? It was obvious to John and those who watched him that the questions he was responding to were meant not purely to elicit delicate information about Christian theology but (insofar as Iain’s questions emerged with an unmistakably mischievous grin) were designed with the aim of causing a ruckus. ‘There you go!!’ cried Iain as John admitted he would be uneasy with having a son who was gay, as if a prosecution lawyer had finally managed to catch the accused in a self-condemning lie. Such was the competitive and almost pugilistic nature of emotionally enskiled witness (and counter witness) at sea.

In this sense, the debates that ensued (about the authenticity of fossils or the authority of the Bible), while partially undertaken simply as an antidote to the boredom of tailing prawns for hours on end, also had a socially constitutive effect – that of maximising the felt incongruence between Christian and ‘non-Christian’ crew members. These two camps were not compatible, because, according to both John and Iain, Christians and ‘non-Christians’ lived and believed in very different ways. Iain played the lottery and John did not. John believed in divine creation and Iain in evolution. John voiced strong opposition to homosexuality and Iain said he wasn’t bothered. Their verbal jousting circled around the same point time and again: John and Iain were both fishermen, but were fundamentally not the same. Yet it is important to realise that incongruence was not an end in itself; when it came to the verbal joust, it was necessary but not sufficient. The initial goal of the game was to establish status differentiation on the basis of who was and was not ‘saved’. Only latterly, once this status differentiation had been established, could the real work begin through the ‘testimony’ of preaching and teaching and the ‘anti-testimony’ of joking and arguing. This ‘work’, then, went beyond the verbal joust, addressing the more substantive matter of one’s future after death.

It will be remembered that when I was in the hopper raking prawns onto the tray I smashed and killed a brown crab. Paul and Charlie reacted by jokingly pointing out what they saw as my blatant hypocrisy – claiming to be a Christian while being needlessly cruel to one of God’s creatures. Intriguingly, they were not really talking to me – they were actually arguing with John. Hence John’s leaping to my defence: ‘Ah, but when he goes to bed tonight he’ll be *saved*’ he said, with the unmistakable tone of a preacher in his pulpit. From John’s point of view the difference in status could scarcely be greater; I had been ‘saved’, that is, I was going to heaven regardless of my cruelty to crabs; Paul and Charlie however had not been saved and were presently en route to hell. And they needed to be told so – and in the same manner as they could expect at a gospel preaching in Gamrie on a Sunday night.

Importantly, while this status difference was expressed first and foremost in salvific terms and thus held to be ultimate, it was also made knowable spatially and thus experienced in the present. To give a commonly deployed local example, John might be

found in a prayer meeting on a Saturday night whereas Iain might well be in the pub. Charlie and Paul went on to stretch this social distance as far as fantasy permitted them, describing binge drinking, gorging on Indian food and sex acts involving defecation. The goal here, then, was not intra-crew solidarity via status equivalence but rather intra-crew separation via salvific status differentiation, symbolised, at its most extreme, in the utter incongruence between hymn singing and coprophilia.

Interestingly, the ‘unholy alliance’ that seemed to exist between Charlie, Paul and Iain found its inverted mirror image in the conversations that occurred between Zander, John and myself. While we, as Christians were expected to ‘preach the gospel’ to the ‘unsaved’ on deck, we were also expected to ‘teach the Bible’ to each other, through our discussions of theology, Biblical history, creationist science and so on. John asserted this relational expectation early on by telling me that God had sent me to him to help him get through the week. Later on, monkey fangs were used by Zander to teach us about the account of the ‘Fall of Man’ in the Book of Genesis. I played my part by rising to defend John against a thorny question from Iain about creationism by repeating a sermon excerpt that taught about the innocence of incest in the Garden of Eden. It was this teamwork that acted to socially construct the ‘zero-sum game’ of the verbal joust; evangelistic witness countered by pugnacious rebuttal followed by evangelistic witness and so on.

And it is here that we see how these verbal exchanges might be helpfully construed as what I have referred to as competitive labour, that is, the back and forth point scoring of religious debate and banter. As with fish, the stocks of human souls available for harvest were limited and constantly attempting to elude capture. They had to be struggled for if they were to be ‘brought in’, either onto the deck or ‘under the sound of the gospel’. Crucially, however, where the zero-sum game of trawling for prawns was largely one of economics, the zero-sum game of trawling for souls, was, for Christian fishermen like John and Zander, experienced not as a competition between rival boats but between rival spiritual kingdoms. The incongruence that existed within the churches between ‘teaching the Bible’ to the ‘saved’ and ‘preaching the gospel’ to the ‘unsaved’ was the same incongruence that existed on the boats between those ‘saved’ men who witnessed and those ‘unsaved’ men who pushed back. Yet it would be wrong to give the impression that

the ‘game’ of evangelism neatly placed those who witnessed in offence and those who were objects of witness, in defence – indeed as Iain made abundantly clear, the opposite was often the case. What was true, however, was that competitive evangelistic witness – like any (zero-sum) game – took for itself both an object and an end; that of the soul and salvation respectively.

Given this locally important object/end distinction (whereby those held to be ‘non-Christians’ are objectified by virtue of having an ‘unsaved’ object within their bodies, that is, their soul) how might evangelistic verbal jousting be ‘read’ as a kind of labour? At its simplest, ‘witness’ is labour insofar as local people described it as such, referring to their evangelistic efforts – their prayers, their preaching, their teaching – as a ‘spiritual toil’, a ‘labour for the Lord’ and a ‘work of faith’. Further, in the classic Weberian sense, local fishermen described to me how labour at sea (both the physical work of trawling for prawns and the ‘spiritual’ work of evangelism) was both a ‘duty’ and a ‘calling’. The zero-sum game of fishing for prawns and being ‘fishers of men’ simply *had* to be engaged in. ‘It’s all we’ve ever known’ these fishermen would tell me – a phrase that was also used to describe the ‘spiritual privilege’ of growing up in a Christian village. In this sense, fishing and witness were held to be mutual imperatives, and ones that were material and religious simultaneously. Theirs was a double kind of fishing, fulfilling the (unashamedly patriarchal) ‘scriptural mandate’ for a man to ‘provide for his family’⁴⁴ as well as the purportedly universal and endlessly agonised over call to ‘fulfil the Great Commission’⁴⁵ by evangelising the whole world.

With the scale of this physical and spiritual task in mind, it may (or may not) go without saying that putting fish on the table and bottoms on the pews was said to involve real toil. Fishing for prawns is dangerous, dirty and exhausting work. But according to many of my Christian informants, so was a life of ‘teaching’ and ‘preaching’, littered, as it was, with discouragement, rejection and ridicule. This was why John was so adamant that God had sent me to him during our week at sea together – he wasn’t so much nervous about coping with the physical labour of trawling for prawns as the spiritual toil of witnessing

⁴⁴ See Jorion (1982) on this gendered religious division of labour.

⁴⁵ Matthew 28.16-20.

to fellow crew members. As with preaching, fishing and evangelism were said to require a kind of sacrifice – of self, time, comfort and worldly pleasures. Further, as with testimony, such witness was sometimes said to require loss of privacy and even dignity, as the soul of the Christian was laid bare in self-destructive confessional avowal (see Foucault 1993) before those being evangelised. Crucially, however, such centripetal immolation (think here of John’s admission to disapproving of homosexuality much to Iain’s triumphant scorn) is only part of the picture and occurs alongside other more obviously outward moving power dynamics.

The village in miniature

I want to end here by suggesting that at the heart of the competitive ‘zero-sum game’ of fishing and witness is a picture of the village in miniature that acts to bring Gamrics’ socio-spiritual coalitions, subdivisions and power dynamics into uniquely sharp relief through enforced intimacy on the trawler. Life on the trawler can be seen as representing the village in miniature in all three of the ways discussed in Chapter II, coming together to form its own ‘triple pinch’ out at sea. Because economy, demography and eschatology each have a role to play in framing the sociality found on board Gamrie’s fishing boats, I want to examine each briefly, starting with economics.

As discussed in Part I of the thesis, money shapes much of life in Gamrie, and residence and religion are no exception. Historically, money has tended to move up the brae, with the fishermen initially living in tiny cottages by the shore in the Seatown. In the two decades following the Second World War, some of these early dwellings were vacated in favour of more modern and spacious – and thus prestigious – housing, some private and some local authority. Since the 1990s, newly custom built ‘fisher mansions’ have been commissioned by wealthy skippers at the very top of the brae with the old fisher cottages now almost exclusively the preserve of retired English ‘incomers’. Intriguingly, a strikingly similar spatial division exists on board the modern trawlers. At the very top of the boat is the wheelhouse, largely the domain of the skipper, who is generally the best paid and most wealthy person on board. Just one deck below is usually the skipper’s

private quarters⁴⁶. Below this deck were the crews' shared quarters and below this the engine room and below this the hold for the catch.

Such (often spatialised) income and wealth inequalities were a source of latent tensions onboard the boat, emerging – just as they did onshore – in boasting and jealousy, over, among other things, cars, clothing and holiday destinations. Inequalities were made all the more visible (and extreme) by the fact that some boats had Filipino workers – the nautical equivalent of an 'incomer', but without their wealth – who slept on the boat even when ashore, earning a small fixed wage⁴⁷ as opposed to a share. Interestingly, those with the strongest religious commitment were also said to have the most money – a (strikingly Weberian) sign of God's blessing according to local Christians and an aggravating puzzle to those without this salvific status.

Demographic power inequalities were also noticeable, extending well beyond the Scottish-Filipino divide that existed onboard the boats that contracted immigrant labour. Familial proximity to the skipper was key. As I describe in the ethnography below, Georgie Jr. (the skipper's teenage son) slept more and worked less than the crew who were not the skipper's kin. Such power dynamics were said to carry over into the churches, with more than one retired fisherman complaining to me that being a successful (and thus wealthy) skipper often transferred into undue influence over the running of religious affairs onshore. Equally – as again was the case onshore – age remained a factor onboard the boats with regard to one's level of religious commitment. Charlie and Iain, in their late thirties or early forties (the age group most strikingly absent from church) were also the most vocally hostile to John's efforts to preach to them. John, on the other hand, was the youngest and most committed Christian crewman onboard, and intriguingly, was also very likely the wealthiest⁴⁸. It was this economic and demographic power base that combined to form the sociological backdrop to the competitive 'zero-sum game' of evangelistic witness.

⁴⁶ While the *Celestial Dawn* followed this pattern, the *Flourish* did not, with its skipper choosing to sleep in a bunk alongside the crew – an unusual situation according to many fishermen I spoke to.

⁴⁷ Some as little as £100 a week (about £1/hr if the fishing was exceptionally heavy).

⁴⁸ Being a skipper awaiting the construction of his new trawler.

But what of the eschatological pinch? How did the impending end of the world colour this game of ‘witness’ and ‘counter-witness’? It did so in the same way it did onshore in Gamrie’s kirks and meeting halls, that is, by creating, reinforcing and reproducing the (urgent and imperative) socio-spiritual boundaries of ‘saved’ and ‘unsaved’ personhood. Hence Iain, Charlie and Paul forming a team to play one side of the ‘game’ and John, Zander and myself forming an (albeit more tacit and uneasy) team on the other. ‘Ah, but when he goes to bed tonight, he’ll be *saved*’ John said of me as a rebuttal to my shaming at the hands of Paul and Charlie. ‘Why does he go all the way to Africa to build darkies hooses and won’t even feed his *crew*? It’s just for show: “Look at me, I’m a Christian”’ came the response from Iain a few days later as we ate dinner in the mess. It is in this sense that salvific status becomes *the* key indicator of who is said to be what type of person. And it is this that frames who says what at the tray and with what effects. Evangelistic conversations between Christian fishermen about Biblical creationism – spoken not primarily to edify the ‘saved’ but to challenge the ‘unsaved’ – led to just as obviously sideways conversations between non-Christian crew about drunken sex. ‘Teaching’ and ‘preaching’, then, are not discrete categories performed in isolation from each other, but, as with ‘saved’ and ‘unsaved’, are mutually interdependent categories that are only intelligible insofar as they stand in (linguistic and material) relation to their eschatological opposite.

And so it goes on, round the clock for six days – or as long as there are prawns to tail – along the short steel tray, that comprises the working universe of Gamrie’s trawlermen as played out within the village in miniature. Navigating the socio-spiritual power relations onboard the Flourish – just like navigating the seabed – takes skill. Enskilment then, is not only about ‘getting one’s sea legs’ in order to become a skilful prawn fisherman, but can also be applied to the process whereby one learns to become a skilful fisher of men. It is to this process that I now want to turn to by looking at the events of my second trip to sea on board the Celestial Dawn.

Second Trip⁴⁹: Celestial Dawn, October 2009



Fig. 41: Celestial Dawn BF 109 (Simple Machines 2008)

I was packing my bags to get ready for another week at sea, this time on a trawler owned by a Brethren skipper who had come out of the Closed movement to join the Open Brethren in Gamrie. It was a month after my first trip on the Flourish and the weather, being October, was growing worse. What's more, I was sailing on a full stomach having just eaten two plates of rich food at a goodbye party for a Romanian couple who had been living with an Open Brethren couple in the village for the past year. I took my anti-sickness tablets, telling myself they would do the trick and made a few rushed phone calls to say goodbye to family and then headed over to meet the skipper, Georgie Sr., and his son, Georgie Jr., at the Bog.

We were on our way to Fraserburgh by 9pm – roughly an hour earlier than we were with the Flourish. When we got to the harbour I was introduced to the other crew: David,

⁴⁹ I did not get much time to take fieldnotes during this trip; the hauls were so large that we were working round the clock. Any notes that I did take – as with my time on the Flourish – were saved as text messages on my mobile phone, but were much briefer. What follows was constructed mainly from memory shortly after my return to shore, backed, where possible, by those brief notes taken on my phone.

Georgie Sr.'s nephew, Jimmy the cook and two Filipino fishermen, Dan and John-boy. We were off in no time, but as soon as the boat left the harbour we started heaving from side to side. I was standing at the back of the boat with Georgie Jr. watching the harbour disappear out of sight. After the lights of Fraserburgh were no longer visible, we both headed through to the mess and joked about how sick we felt. Eventually Georgie Jr. went to his bed and I went up to chat to the guys in the wheel house but spent most of my time concentrating hard on not vomiting. David discovered a book of comical Doric⁵⁰ poems and read a couple out to Jimmy and myself. They all laughed at the punch line but I was left none the wiser. As my nausea rose, eventually I had to go to bed, remembering to take a bag with me. Laying flat seemed to make things worse not better. I must have been drifting in and out of sleep; all I can remember is being in a cold sweat and saying 'Jesus have mercy' over and over again in my head, this being the only anti-sickness prayer I could muster in my condition. Unfortunately it did not work and I vomited three times that night.

* * *

We were rudely awoken by Georgie Sr. making strange screeching noises over the loudspeaker which then gave way to the even more bizarre wake-up call: 'ALL NATIONS RISE!! ALL NATIONS RISE!!' which, I learned later, was the signal that it was time to shoot the gear. I was told that I would be involved in this, and, having never done so on the Flourish, was somewhat nervous at the prospect. It was my job to move the poles that directed the nets into their right position and then climb to the upper deck to feed a steel cable over the front of the trawl door and back down to the lower deck to allow the nets to be hoisted aboard so that their catches could be dumped into the hopper. After a couple of corrective instructions I got the hang of the process and only had to watch that the trawl door (a huge 2m squared piece of steel) did not crush my arms when I was feeding the cable to the men below. After we shot the gear we headed down to the mess for breakfast. Still not feeling overly revived by the freezing sea air, I picked my way through a bowl of cornflakes and headed back down below deck with the others for a few hours sleep before our first haul.

* * *

⁵⁰ The local dialect in Northeast Scotland.

Having eaten so little, by the end of the first haul, I was tired and low on energy. The second haul was huge and took seven hours to clear with only a two minute break in the middle for Pepsi and biscuits which we had at the tray. As we cleared the backlog Jimmy was constantly getting at us to speed up, which, after several hours, became wearing. At one point I lost my temper and dragged far too many prawns onto the tray at too great a speed causing some to spill out onto the deck. Jimmy just smiled and kept tailing. Georgie Jr. was by far the slowest worker, but at only 16 years old, this was hardly surprising. As on the Flourish, much of the conversation around the tray was about religion, most of it occurring between David, Jimmy and myself. David said he was brought up in the AoG but had since married into a (hugely wealthy) Open Brethren family in Peterhead. Jimmy said he was raised as a nominal Church of Scotland goer but now did not attend any place of worship.

The conversation moved from churches to evolution and back again. David asked me what I thought about creationism and I told him that while I did not believe in literal six day creationism, I actually thought it did not matter much – what mattered for me was not how the world was created but who created it. David said that while he could see what I was saying, he did not agree – for him, ascribing to literal six day creationism was important if the authority of the Bible was to be upheld. David also asked me more directly about my own church background – what did the Free Church of Scotland believe? Why did they not have music? Why did they only sing psalms? What were the key differences between the Free Church, the AoG and the Open Brethren?

I was aware that much of this conversation was being pushed by David, not for my benefit, but for Jimmy's – as an act of witness. My suspicions were confirmed when David started telling us all about his own conversion experience – how he had realised that he needed a saviour, how he had responded to the gospel, how he had come to the Open Brethren and how he had been baptised as an adult and entered into membership. Once he had finished telling his story, David turned to me and asked when I had become a Christian. I could tell that what David was looking for me to give was my own 'testimony'. Aware that my own Christian life lacked the temporally specific and personally dramatic rupture of most 'born-again' conversion narratives I stuttered something vague about not really knowing when I was 'saved' but had started to take the faith my parents raised me in more seriously when I first went to university. I could tell this wasn't the response David had been looking for so to try and partially meet his

expectation I changed tack by speaking (very un-anthropologically) about how what mattered most in the Christian life was not church but Jesus. I emphasised that from my experience, all churches – and all Christians – were full of faults and problems. As I talked (or, perhaps better said, as I *testified*), I grew increasingly uncomfortable with the implications of what I was saying, as if I had stepped over some invisible intellectual line and transformed myself from an anthropologist into a missionary. It was clear that David did not share my hesitation, enthusiastically agreeing with all of my most Christocentric comments. Eventually we cleared the hopper and went through to the mess for food.

Georgie Sr. said a prayer to give thanks for the food (spicy fajitas) in exactly the same way as he always did, in a low, almost completely inaudible tone, with head bowed and hands folded. We all had to wait for this grace to be said before we could begin eating, even if Georgie Sr. was last to the table by several minutes. These prayers felt very much like a ritual: what seemed to matter was not any conveyed linguistic meaning – for the words Georgie Sr. prayed were not intended to be audible – but rather the simple fact that ‘the grace’ had been said, thus allowing us to eat.

As we did so, the conversation once again returned to religion. Georgie Sr. began to quiz me on how I had found going to the other places of worship in the village, eventually steering the conversation around to the two most recent splits at Braehead (see fig. 7) – the Closed Brethren fellowship that he and his family had been attending up until 1999. What reasons had I been given for the splits? I responded vaguely by outlining a few commonly voiced complaints. ‘Maybe it’s better that you only ken half the story...’ Georgie said tantalisingly. I assured him it wouldn’t be, hoping he would fill in some blanks for me, but in the end all I got from him was what I had heard before – accusations of secret meetings and keys being intentionally broken off in locks to stop some from having access to the hall. In a strange twist, Georgie then began to criticise the fellowship he currently attends – the Open Brethren – and specifically their view of adult-believers baptism, suggesting that they ignored passages in the Bible where entire households were baptised, further explaining to me that Moses leading the ancient Israelites through the Red Sea was also a ‘type’ of baptism. I was still struggling with physical exhaustion after clearing the previous hauls of prawns so went straight to bed after we had finished eating. And as the days went on, it was this rhythm of work followed by food followed by sleep that continued to frame much of my experience of living on the trawler.



Fig. 42: David and Dan hauling the gear



Fig. 43: Georgie Sr. and David winch aboard a huge haul of prawns



Fig. 44: Joe, Jimmy, Dan, John-boy and David at the tray

On Tuesday afternoon we cleared two huge hauls – a fifty stone and a seventy stone. We had a pie on deck halfway through the first haul then a cheese roll when it was clear only to haul again immediately after. The religious talk persisted with David instigating a fairly heavy conversation about salvation. Did Jimmy ever think about death? Did he have assurance about where he would go when he died? If God were to ask him, what reason would he give to be allowed into heaven? David's questions to Jimmy were largely rhetorical, designed to elicit, in the words of many a gospel preacher, a 'silent response of the heart'. And then, as if by way of explanation for my benefit, David turned to me and said 'Jimmy kens it all, he kens it all, don't you Jimmy? He kens the gospel – I've told him loads of times'.

At one point in our chat I found myself backing David up by repeating what I had heard at a special evangelistic meeting at the Open Brethren in Gamrie where the preacher spoke about the difference between actively rejecting and passively neglecting salvation. Jimmy seemed to be listening hard to what we were saying. As David and I talked, I began to feel that same sense of unease about having 'overstepped' some kind of boundary – was I doing participant observation or was I preaching? What I found most disconcerting was the fact that I seemed to be losing purchase on the difference between

these two activities as my words and presence became appropriated into David's larger programme of evangelism. When we finally had the hopper emptied, I felt as relieved as Jimmy looked when it came for him to cook the dinner.

* * *

By Thursday I was becoming increasingly exhausted to the point that I was too tired to text many notes on my phone before I fell asleep after hauls. The hauls had been enormous and full of small prawns so the work was slow. My 'moon boots' (huge thick steel capped wellies) had next to no padding and my feet were in agony – a common problem – making the work a lot more miserable. During one haul I was reduced to standing on a rough bit of scrap carpet that came up in the nets which I cut to double thickness to try and take some of the pain away. At the end of one of the hauls, Dan offered to use his reflexology techniques on me to relieve the pain and out of sheer desperation, I agreed. We sat at the bottom of my bunk and he carefully identified various pressure points on my feet and lower legs by gently pressing on them with his thumb. At first the pain was severe, causing me to moan through gritted teeth. Slowly he rotated around various 'pressure points' and eventually the pain began to subside until, as if by magic, my feet no longer hurt at all. I thanked him and collapsed into bed.



Fig. 45: The crew struggling to fix a chain back at Fraserburgh harbour

We got back to Fraserburgh harbour by 3am on Saturday morning. My feet were really hurting again but we still needed to unload the fish and then load new boxes onto the boat. Willie (George Sr.'s twin brother, and a member of the Seatown Closed Brethren) came down to the harbour to help us land. As we worked he asked how I had gotten on at Braehead when Betty, a mutual friend, was preaching⁵¹. What did she speak on? Was she good? He went on to say that one of the main reasons that he left Braehead was that he did not feel that 'wifey preachers' were scriptural. What really struck me as interesting was what he said in this context of talking about the differences between Seatown and Braehead⁵²: 'You see Joe, we believe in head coverings for women. If you let that go, there's always something else. You can tell if a place is right or not by if the women wear head coverings'. In amongst this conversation, we had a couple of dangerous moments when two huge stacks of fish boxes came loose and fell onto the boat. Once the boat was unloaded and reloaded, I power washed the top deck and the other guys mended the nets. A problem with fixing a chain resulted in a long delay and we eventually headed home by midday. I had another long shower when I arrived and then slept before heading back out – totally exhausted – to do my normal Saturday night shift at the Fraserburgh Fishermen's Mission.

Verbal Enskilment: Learning to be Fishers of Men

If we are to understand something of the experiences of the fishermen on the Flourish and the Celestial Dawn, it seems that we need to grasp what they are saying and doing in terms of practice. I want to suggest that the ethnography above shows us that religious talk, like other forms of labour, exist as a certain kind of learned emotional and material practice. Further, I want to suggest that it is by examining this practice that we can develop our understanding of the relationship between words and objects. It will be my argument for the remainder of this chapter that our understanding of this relationship is dependent upon our ability to further theorise what I have (rather cryptically) been referring to as verbal and emotional 'enskilment'. Before returning to my ethnography of the Flourish and Celestial Dawn, then, let me first attempt just such a theorisation.

⁵¹ This was the one and only time I heard a woman preach in Gamrie.

⁵² See Fig. 13 for more details.

In a seminal reconfiguration of practice theory, Gísli Pálsson argues that ‘getting one’s sea legs’ is a type of enskilment by arguing that skills such as fishing are not only bodily dispositions but also ‘a necessarily collective enterprise – involving whole persons, social relations, and communities of practice...’ (1994: 902). Crucially, such skills are themselves located within a ‘social and natural environment’ (1994: 901). I find this argument very stimulating and want to try and apply Pálsson’s comments to what I have been calling the ‘zero-sum game’ of evangelistic witness. Just as persons are not reducible to a physical soma, so the environment need not be reduced to a physical landscape. Indeed, where the environment is held to be simultaneously social and natural (ibid.), what interests me here is the verbal content of a social environment that is itself apprehendable in and through the deployment of words. Traversing this environment (like learning a language or catching a fish) requires skill, that is, it requires the meeting of person, place and thing. More specifically, in the religious context of Gamrie’s prawn trawlers, enskilment requires the meeting of fishermen, the North Sea and words of witness. It is the process by which this meeting occurs that I want to focus on for the rest of this chapter.

While it might seem strange to try and speak of ‘getting one’s evangelistic legs’ this is essentially what I want to argue⁵³. As I have already described above, it was often told to me how fishing and evangelism were heavy labour, fishing in the physical sense and evangelism in the verbal. I still think both comments were meant literally – fishing and witness really were experienced as a kind of toil, evidenced by John’s witness to Iain and David’s evangelistic efforts with Jimmy. In this sense, as with the physical skill of hunting prawns, Gamrie’s Christian fishermen also needed to learn how to become fishers of men. What we see here is the emergence of a kind of enskilment – the deploying of a skill within its proper environmental (in this case linguistic and emotional) context. Such skill can be seen in David’s careful steering of our early conversations at the tray from discussion of church backgrounds (to establish where we stood ecclesiastically), to discussions of creation and evolution (to establish where we stood theologically), to a more personal and emotional account of his own ‘conversion

⁵³ Intriguingly, such sentiments appeared familiar to my informants who not only took great delight in the Biblical language of being ‘fishers of men’, but also associated evangelistic preaching with the walking of feet.

experience' (his primary act of witness) and finally to questions about my own salvation, requiring me to testify as he himself had done. The aim was clear as far as David was concerned – he and I were to evangelise Jimmy.

Interestingly, verbal evangelistic success was not said to be commensurate with a specific salvific change (what fishermen call a 'catch') in the soul of the *hearer*, but was rather rendered in terms of the *speaker's* ability to continually discharge their life-long duty of witness. 'He kens it all, don't you Jimmy? He kens the gospel – *I've told him loads of times*' came the explanation from David. Evangelistic success was about 'speaking a word in season' – the right words at the right time in the right context. Which is why David was so excited by Jimmy's apparent reflection upon our conversations over the tray. As far as David was concerned, his witness (and mine) seemed to be having the desired effect of causing Jimmy to 'consider Christ'.

'People may not read their Bibles, but they will read you' was a local phrase used as a shorthand description for this imperative of Christian witness. It was in the light of this imperative that my informants sought not only to be 'read' by others, *but to read themselves out*, in a kind of Foucauldian (1993) confession, to whoever would listen, in this back and forth of fishing and evangelism. The similarities here with the Islamic notion of *da'wa* are striking. On this point, Anderson (2011), commenting upon the Egyptian piety movement, argues:

Piety is unambiguously social: it is about *da'wa* – 'calling others' to live correctly (Hirschkind 2006:56). [...] In the contemporary Egyptian piety movement, the principle modes of participation revolve around the exchange of words: not only listening, but also transmitting learning, criticising, exhorting, admonishing... [P]ietists steer each other, and are steered towards, the conditions that make virtue possible. [...] Like gifts, pious words both result from and produce a sense of obligation... There is an obligation to speak and to speak out. This is the true nature of *da'wa* (Anderson 2011: 6, 7, 15).

Evangelistic witness, like *da'wa*, is social; it occurs around the tray as men work and chat; it is centrally concerned with the exchange of words – words about evolution and homosexuality and salvation in Christ; and fundamentally, it results from and seeks to

produce a sense of obligation insofar as it is both a duty of the ‘saved’ and an admonition to the ‘unsaved’. And it is in all of these senses that it is also a form of verbal and emotional enskilment – a skill that uses words and feelings to ‘call others’, through exhortation and encouragement to become a certain kind of ‘born again believer’. Yet this also reveals an interesting point of divergence between *da’wa* and evangelistic witness; the former can be directed at Muslims whereas the latter cannot – in ‘good faith’ – be directed towards Christians. This is because, locally, these two types of personhood (‘saved’ and ‘unsaved’) are both unavoidable and incommensurable, and, in this sense, as I argued in Chapter III, David’s witnessing to a Christian would be needless. Crucially, then, where much of the piety of *da’wa* stems from the sociality of mutual Islamic encouragement (Anderson 2011: 17) (that is, it concerns ‘solidarity’ and ‘equivalence’ (Stiles 1972)), evangelistic witness, as I have argued above, remains centrally attached to notions of separation and differentiation.

Yet my major point still remains: evangelistic witness – just like fishing – is first and foremost an example of practice; as practice it must be learned and as a thing that must be learned – not only in a certain way but also in a certain place – it is also an example of enskilment. Witness, then, really is like getting one’s sea legs; it is achieved when one’s evangelistic commitment is deployed in a contextually appropriate manner by using the verbally and emotionally appropriate (and now familiar) tools of preaching and witness. Indeed, John and David were preaching all week, standing not in pulpits or on platforms, but rather at the tray while tailing prawns, extolling the miracle of divine creation and the imperative of spiritual salvation. Further, both men ‘gave testimony’, seen in David’s emotional retelling of his first response to hearing the gospel and John’s ‘heartfelt’ description of the work of the Holy Spirit in personally illuminating the scriptures. The importance of using these evangelistic tools in the right way mirrors the importance of properly using the right ‘gear’ when trawling for prawns, a practice which involves its own kind of skilful ‘in-gathering’ of God’s creaturely ‘kingdom’, not through the verbal and emotive practice of sermonising and witness but through the (no more and no less material) deployment of boats and nets. Enskilment, then, in both its material and linguistic-emotional forms, requires learning to use one’s body – one’s arms and legs, one’s inner-ear and tongue and one’s eyes and heart – in conjunction with all those other

objects that make up the ‘social and natural environment’ (Pálsson 1994: 901) of the fisherman. Further, it must be done in a sufficiently enskiled way so as to avoid stumbling and catching neither prawns nor men, but only worthless herring and the scornful rebuttal of the ‘unsaved’ other.

Conclusion: Fishing and Evangelism as Enchanted Labour

To the extent that fishing for prawns and being fishers of men, are, as I have argued, to be seen as broadly analogous practices, it seems fair to suggest that what makes a good (i.e. en-skilled) skipper is also what makes a good evangelist. I want to conclude, then, by suggesting that what unites both vocations is an enchanted view of labour. To show how this might be the case I want first to briefly turn my attention to another example of enchanted labour found in a rather different ethnographic context, namely to ‘direct selling’ in Mexico and to the work of Peter Cahn (2006).

Cahn conducted fieldwork among ‘direct’ (unsolicited, door-to-door) salesmen and women in Morelia working for Omnilife, a multi-level marketer⁵⁴ of powdered nutritional supplements, who, he argues fused their profit motive with explicitly spiritual aspirations (2006: 126). Companies such as Omnilife are said to be shot through with an ‘evangelical fervour’ (ibid.: 127) for sales assisted by ‘annual pilgrimages’ (ibid.) to large quasi-religious events at company headquarters. The founders of such (usually American) firms claim God as a business partner (ibid.) with the result that ‘Protestant Christian beliefs in salvation through individual born-again experiences mingled with the demands of profit making’ (ibid.). Further, because multi-level marketing firms achieve sales through an extended network of regular consumer/vendors, this ‘pursuit of recruits... lends itself to the intense Protestant-style proselytising that characterises contemporary direct selling’ (ibid.). So strong is the rhetoric, that Omnilife is said to preach a ‘spiritual message of rebirth through self-empowerment (ibid.: 133). But what is required of these ‘recruits’? The similarity here with the basic premise behind what it means to be an en-skilled Christian onboard Gamrie’s trawlers is striking:

⁵⁴ A business model similar to that of Avon or Tupperware.

Selling in Omnilife does not require either training in nutrition or knowledge of marketing. *The sole requirement is a personal testimony* of self-transformation that compels listeners to want to try the products for themselves (Cahn 2006: 133. Emphasis added).

What matters, then, to borrow a Christian term, is being ‘born-again’ – either through the economics of selling nutritional supplements, or through the religiosity of evangelising the unconverted. Crucially, both the method – testimony – and the effect – self-transformation – remain the same. It is in ‘witnessing’, variously, to the power of ‘Omnilife’ and the ‘Holy Spirit’ (which semantically, at the very least, are surely not so different) that other ‘listeners’ (that is customers/congregants) are compelled to ‘try the products for themselves’ (ibid.) be it ‘Thermogen Coffee’ or ‘the blood of Jesus’. It is not education or training or knowledge that matters, but rather the ability to skilfully engage in the zero-sum game of competitive evangelism, winning converts to the cause who will themselves not only become consumers, but also, in a very literal sense, both ‘street preachers’ and ‘door-to-door’ direct sellers of the gospel of rebirth and self-transformation. Yet I am in danger here of overemphasising the importance of some specific similarities between evangelism and direct-selling in order to make my more general point. To avoid this pitfall it seems helpful to flag a key difference between the two practices, namely that unlike evangelistic witness as I observed it on the trawlers, Omnilife is ‘more concerned with individual therapeutic outcomes than with eternal salvation’ (ibid.: 134). The ‘quasi-religious’ (ibid.: 126) status of Omnilife, then, differs greatly in this respect to the candidly Protestant religious quest for everlasting life.

Yet my key point still remains – Omnilife and evangelistic witness are both examples of enchanted labour. Cahn argues the case for Omnilife by suggesting that direct-selling is not straightforwardly a precursor to full blown adoption of neo-liberal economics but rather a kind of spirituality:

Instead of aligning people’s mental frameworks with the conditions of capitalist work, *direct selling brings concordance between their work lives and their spiritual beliefs* (Cahn 2006: 138. Emphasis added).

Which is why at a rally Cahn attended, one of his informants, (as if performing an act of da'wa), 'called' other Omnilife converts to a life of full commitment to the company with the following exhortation:

Don't count the amount of money you've earned; count the number of people you've helped. There is a big difference between selling the product and sharing it. We've received so many blessings. It's beautiful to know I'm the carrier of something that helps people. The grace is his who created us (Cahn 2006: 136).

Bearing in mind that Omnilife recruits are interested in therapy and the Christians of Gamrie are interested in salvation, before I come to the final point in my argument, I want to present this quote again, but slightly amended, to better fit the concerns of Gamrie's Christians:

Don't count the amount of money you've earned; count the number of people you've [saved]. [...] We've received so many blessings. It's beautiful to know I'm the carrier of something that [saves] people. The grace is his who created us (Cahn 2006: 136. Quote amended).

The reason I find this amended quote insightful is that it is exactly the kind of religious rhetoric that was spoken to me on dozens of occasions by many different committed Christian fishermen who were also engaged in the lifelong toil of evangelism. By simply replacing the word 'help' with the word 'save', we have obtained a nearly perfect statement of the local folk theology of being a fisher of both prawns and men. The message I heard preached in pulpits and witnessed to at the tray was that for 'the man who ventures from day to day on the briny deep' (Thomson 1849: 174), such a calling did not finish with the accumulation of wealth (even where it started with it) but was also fundamentally concerned with the saving of souls.

And it was this that constituted the enchantment of labour, that is, the concordance between a life of work and a life of religion. Yet for the Christians of Gamrie, such an enchanted state of affairs – a work-life animated by the magical (i.e. supernatural) possibility of catching not only prawns but also the bodies and souls of men – was not a

‘bringing back’, that is, it was not, despite wider economic and demographic pressures, a new process of *re*-enchantment, but rather the continuation of an enchantment that always was. Simply put, the en-skilled, zero-sum game of competitive evangelistic witness was never anything but an enchanted religious enterprise. What is it, then, that made a good skipper? It was the same thing that made a good door-to-door salesman of health promoting powders, and the same thing that made a good evangelist, or any good (modern Weberian) Protestant for that matter: a competitive, all-or-nothing, self-made, workaholic who relied not upon nautical or theological or business qualifications, but ‘merely [upon] a testimonial of personal transformation’ (Cahn 2006: 136) from a uselessly seasick deckhand to a properly en-skilled fisher of prawns and men. And it is in this sense that, just like the direct salesman, the ‘calling’ of the fisherman (whatever their religion) can be seen as a kind of Protestantism *par excellence*, that is, without the need (or even the option) of a human-divine mediator (Jorion 1982: 280). Where every man is said to be his own skipper, he is, in effect, also his own Priest, fulfilling his own individual quest to undertake his own enchanted labour. Having considered, then, the enchanting power of words, let us now turn our attention to signs, and specifically in the next chapter, to the enchanting power of the immanence of God and the Devil.

Part III: *Signs*

Chapter VI

Providence and Attack

This chapter differs from the previous three insofar as it is not primarily about the speaking of and listening to words and language, but is rather concerned with the processes by which ‘signs’ are identified and experienced as part of the enchantment of the everyday. Yet, this chapter is related to what has gone before it insofar as the identification and experience of ‘signs’ clearly involved the use of language.

Importantly, however, words and language were not the only enchanting forces at work here; material objects, too, played their part. Making this simple ethnographic observation forces us to question long established assumptions that Christianity, and particularly Protestantism, is purely a religion of transcendence (Cannell 2006: 39). To the extent that Christianity is not only implicated (by proxy) within the world of material objects but also actively engaged in (directly) deploying them through the daily round of religious experience, it seems that Cannell’s call for anthropology to escape the paradigm of Christianity-as-an-impossible-religion is not only helpful but also essential if our understandings of this religion is to move beyond the supposed opposition between beliefs and objects, words and materiality.

On this point of oppositional thinking, my contribution in this chapter follows on from much of what I have said in previous chapters and is further developed in the chapters that follow. My point is this: in order to escape the opposition, (in this case between words and material objects), our task is not to break up the received anthropological formulation into its distinct constituent parts, but rather to conflate those constituent parts, showing them not as two sides of the same coin, but rather as symbiotic expressions of the same experience. In the context of this chapter, this requires seeing transcendence as a kind of immanence (God in the gutter) and immanence as a kind of transcendence (a washing machine as a material index of the divine). To further grasp how this relates to the enchantment of the everyday, I want first to turn to the role of ‘expectancy’ as locally experienced.

Why be expectant?

While sitting in George's car waiting for him to drop off some dry cleaning in Macduff, I noticed his Bible had what looked like a new bright yellow laminated bookmark sticking out of it. I picked up the Bible, opened it up at the marked page and saw that the card was actually a Bible reading schedule. It read:

The Goal: To read one chapter of the New Testament each weekday. This will take us through the New Testament in one year. As you read, remember to be expectant, God wants to fellowship with you and speak to you every day.

I was so taken with it at the time that I took a photo of it on my mobile. When George got back to the car I asked him about it and he said he had been given it when attending a meeting at the Harvest Centre, a charismatic fellowship in Banff. They all planned to read together, George told me, but seemed puzzled by my enthusiasm for a card he was just using as a bookmark.

Those words on George's Bible reading card still fascinate me – 'remember to be expectant...'. Why should he be so? The answer, it seems, is best given by telling Aubry's story.

Aubry was born and brought up on the Shetland Islands. He had just been accepted into the Fishermen's Mission as the superintendent for Shetland. During a 'Mission bus run' for elderly retired fishermen and their wives, Aubry and I spent much of the day talking together about his life and testimony. A week later I interviewed Aubry about his 'spiritual journey'. Much of what he said was about his working life. He described how he was a joiner for a number of years before feeling that God was calling him to go forward for the Baptist ministry. When he was turned down by the church he explained how this left something of a vacuum in his life as well as a sense of spiritual confusion. It is at this point that I want to pick up his story. It is a story of immanence and divine providence – a story of Aubry's acute awareness of God's daily leading and guiding. It is also a story that has interesting things to say about the relationship between coincidence and expectancy. Below is a partial transcript of the interview.

Aubry: A friend of mine had said to me you aren't thinking about a change of job are you? ... there's a portering job going at the hospital. Can I tell them you're interested? And I says yes you can. And the boss man came along to the house and we had an interview ... and he says when can you start? So I was in that [job] for 10 years... My boss was due to retire and I had been promised the job as portering manager so that seemed to be the way things was going [but] through it all I always sought to be open to the Lord...

I was out on the course of my work one day when I met a friend who is also a supporter of the [Fishermen's] Mission back home and he told me that the Mission [in Shetland] were going to apply shortly for a local superintendent ... and he said I think you should apply. Now that kind of knocked me back a bit because I thought ... I was going to be head porter...

Just a couple of hours before a lady had phoned to tell me that her grandmother had passed on... but the next thing that she said really surprised me because she said would you be prepared to take the funeral? [I said I would and it turned out that] the lady that we were burying was the widow of the *only other* Shetland superintendent that [there] had been in the 100 year history of the Mission in Shetland. So that did cause me to think. Some people write these things off as a coincidence but as a Christian, sometimes God has His hand on these things.

JW: *What was the phrase you used the other day?*

Aubry: A Godincidence. A Godincidence... It's too significant just to be able to write off completely and it at least meant that I had to consider [it]. ... My Aunt, who is also a supporter of the Mission says ... I think you should consider this seriously ... and a few days later we had the superintendent from Orkney visiting and ... he sought me out and he said I really think you should consider this. And I thought 'help!' 'What's going on here?' For the next week I still wrestled... One half of me was saying let's just lay it to one side... and the other side of me was saying this has been *too significant*...

[So I agreed to] the interview and two hours later they offered me the position. And ... I wrestled and I wrestled and in the end I says what actually is the

problem? What's holding me back? ... In the end, I think, it really became an altar call and I says, well Lord, I'll just lay this down... on the altar... and I says Lord, I'm laying this down, you'll have to give me the strength ... to do what you are asking me to do and I'm laying this down. So finally, about half past four in the afternoon I made the phone call [to accept the job].

The next day I was off on the boat [on holiday to a Christian convention] and I think it so much confirmed what had happened ... The theme of the convention was 'Faith that Works'! And I thought, yes I know! And one of the new songs ... spoke to me – one of the lines was: *'We shall stand as children of the promise; We will fix our eyes on Him, our souls reward; Till the race is finished and the work is done; We'll walk by faith and not by sight'*. And I realised that that had been a decision that I *had* to take ... I feel that the Lord was ... saying this is your time if you don't take this up you'll maybe have to settle for my second best...

When I got to the final day [of work at the hospital] I did feel that a part of me had died... it was like a bereavement in a sense – there was just this gap... I says... well Lord, you're in the resurrection business, even if part of me has died, you can do something! ... So I had the weekend off and I was taking up the new appointment on the Tuesday and... I took out ... [my Bible reading] notes... and I thought I'll read the passage for today ... And I was amazed when the passage in front of me was *'forgetting those things which are behind, pressing on to take hold, striving to what is ahead'* [Philippians Ch 3.13-14. Paraphrase].
[Overcome with emotion, unable to speak].

JW: *What did you feel when you read that?*

Aubry: I thought, it was just an *overwhelming confirmation* of all that had gone on ... because sometimes ... we are in danger of reading things into scripture, you know, saying well maybe this means this... I've seen folk doing it and I'm very suspicious of that I must admit: "Ah! Well this must mean this!" But I *knew* that you can't really mess about with those words. And that's it.

I want to return to my earlier question – why be expectant? George and his bookmark were very clear: ‘As you read, *remember to be expectant*, God wants to fellowship with you and speak to you every day’. If Aubry’s story has anything to tell us here it is that his God is a God of providence. Importantly, other stories from other informants of mine could and would have led to similar conclusions. Iain received direct signs from God about where to camp and how much petrol to buy when touring Europe. When Jim was converted he destroyed £750 of Harry Potter merchandise he had in his shop, then, after checking his accounts, he discovered he was exactly £750 up on sales from that same time the previous year. Pauline broke down on an isolated country road but was quickly rescued by a bus mechanic who was driving by on his way back from work. And this is surely why George should read expectantly – he should read expectantly for exactly the same reasons that Aubry and my other friends should read expectantly – because God gives ‘*overwhelming confirmation*’ in people’s lives in ways that are ‘*too significant just to be able to write off completely*’ through job offers, funerals, news paper adverts, aunties, phone calls, account checks, bus mechanics, camping sites, convention themes, hymn lyrics and, of course, Bibles and Bible reading notes. It was through the swapping of these stories, then, at church, in homes and on the street, that this local attitude of expectancy was established.

This is interesting because it tells us something important about how these people relate to their God on the basis of divine immanence through this daily experience of providence – ‘As you read, remember to be expectant, *God wants to fellowship with you and speak to you every day*’. God was experienced as immanent in the lives of George and Aubry and others because he was first experienced as providential. In other words, God was brought close through the daily outworking of his divine foresightful care. Aubry was left grieving as a result of leaving his job as a hospital porter. God responded that very day with a call to forget, press on and strive ahead. On the basis of this testimony alone, it seemed that George had good reason to be expectant. Crucially, in this expectation, God was rendered immanent. But how did this change the way in which my friends experienced daily life? The answer, it seems, has to do with the category of coincidence.

What I want to argue here is not only that God was experienced as immanent by first being experienced as providential, but that this initial experience of providence, is itself contingent on the abolition of the category of coincidence. We need, therefore, to ask how God's immanence is seen in and through the way in which he sovereignly breaks into the everyday details of the life of the Christian. To try and tease this out, I want to recount a brief story a key informant told me about a particularly powerful spiritual encounter she had in her own life.

God in the gutter

One Tuesday night in December I was invited to a friend's house for tea. Our time of fellowship started with a long discussion about the merits and drawbacks of various Bible translations, in which both the husband (Billy) and wife (Betty) went to various parts of the house to retrieve and thumb through several different Bibles of assorted versions, sizes and stages of decay. At some point Betty came across a long forgotten, creased and very stained piece of paper that had been folded up and tucked into the first few pages of one particular Bible. Her eyes lit up and she moved over to my side and said 'Look at this Joe – I want to show you something'. She carefully removed the piece of paper from its textual cocoon and slowly unfolded it. As Betty read it over to herself it was clear that she was holding back tears. Having composed herself she began to speak about an experience she had had one day when she was feeling incredibly low.

Her husband was on the brink of bankruptcy because he was struggling to meet the repayments on his boat, and, as a result, she was constantly alone in the house because he was always away at sea fishing. She went on to describe how she was also struggling with various personal problems to the point that she felt that God was very distant from her. She felt desperate and angry at God and wondered how she was going to cope. On this particular morning she could not stand being in the house alone anymore so she went for a walk through the village. Betty was keen to point out that she did not know where she was going; she just needed to walk, anywhere, as long as it took her out of the house. She wandered down the brae toward the harbour, her mind full of her troubles, silently crying out to God for help in prayer. As she went round a crook in the road, something caught her eye. It was a small piece of paper fluttering in the gutter. She felt inexplicably compelled to investigate, and so she did. No sooner had she picked it up than she realised

that it was a tear-off page from a 'Choice Gleanings' day-by-day scriptural calendar popular among the Christians in the village. On it was a short Bible verse from the Book of Psalms: 'God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble'. Betty turned to me, lowering the paper, eyes shining with held back tears: 'Now wasn't that amazing!' After showing me the paper, she reverently folded it back up and put it in its home, placing the Bible on top of the others and started to prepare the tea.

What I am interested in here is the extent to which this story can be seen as encapsulating an entire spiritual world view. It was clear to me that what Betty was talking about – the reason why the encounter was amazing – was that it constituted a clear and undeniable act of divine providence. God blew that specific piece of paper with that specific verse into that specific place at that specific time in order that she would find it and have her heart encouraged. But what was the reasoning behind Betty's amazement? Why was this textual encounter amazing and not pure serendipity? It was amazing because of its sheer specificity: that specific piece of paper with that specific verse in that specific place and so on. In this sense, Betty's story, and all those like it that revolve around a certain notion of providence, only make sense in so far as they refused to acknowledge the existence of coincidence. In essence, the category of 'providence' simply abolished the category of 'coincidence' with the effect that every detail in daily life had the potential to be rendered as an encounter with the divine. The specificity of Betty's encounter was important because it gave her a particularly acute sense of God's near presence. She had had, it seems, an experience of the immanence of transcendence.

In speaking of 'the immanence of transcendence' what I want to do is tease out something of the relationship (or rather dislocation) between awe and surprise. Betty's textual encounter brought the experience of God close – close enough, in fact, to hold it in her hands, read it, and then fold it up and place it inside a Bible for safe keeping. The experience left her with a sense of awe – she was stunned into silence when she rediscovered the scrap of paper and then almost entirely overcome with emotion when she recounted the experience to me. Transcendence leaves us with a sense of awe because it is transcendent, that is, it is beyond us; it is utterly other. We are human creatures, God is divine eternity, and in that dislocation (what Cannell refers to as a 'radical discontinuity' (2006: 14)) we experience awe.

Providence and material things

It seems that at this point we might want to ask a rather broader question, namely, what does the world have to be for this to be so? Where providence extends, as we have noted already, to village gutters and pieces of paper, it seems that it is 'out there', in the realness and actuality of material things that the answer is to be found. But before I develop this theoretically, let me first try and fill in some ethnographic blanks by recounting two stories from my fieldwork.

The washing machine at Kathleen's house had broken. She knew she could not afford a new machine and began to wonder what to do. The weekend came and it was Sunday – I was due to see some folk in Macduff for lunch in between services. George (whose bookmark I was commenting on earlier) picked me up and off we went. After lunch with friends we drove over to his new flat in Whitehills, settling down into a couple of plush armchairs to digest. I lazily sifted through a pile of brand new theological textbooks that George had recently bought for a course he was taking, with him giving me a commentary on each one as I went. When we got to the bottom of the pile, George, totally out of the blue, turned to me and said 'You don't know anyone that needs a washing machine do you? Because this flat came with one and I don't have anywhere to put my own'. Having got over my initial astonishment I explained that, yes, Kathleen badly needed one as her own machine had broken just a few days ago. 'Well there you go then' said George with no particular sense of surprise 'she can have my one', commenting on how the whole situation was a clear 'Godincidence'. I phoned Kathleen to tell her the news. She was delighted and said what an answer to prayer it was. George went on to describe how he saw it as an act of Christian service: 'I was actually praying that I wouldn't have to throw it away because I don't like to waste anything if my Christian brothers and sisters can use it'. By Tuesday the machine was sitting in the corner of Kathleen's kitchen and by the end of the week our clothes were clean again.

* * *

One Friday in late April I went into the photo processing shop in Banff and bumped into Jan, a South African pastor who had come to Aberdeenshire to train as a minister. He was filling in what looked to be hundreds of pages of immigration forms so his wife could join him. We went for coffee and he told me a story about how, when back in South

Africa, he was struggling to know whether or not it was God's will for him to go to Scotland. He was sitting in his car at an exceptionally busy four way intersection in Pretoria. At that precise moment, a huge 18-wheeler truck decided to do a U-turn right in the middle of the junction. It took two complete traffic light changes to complete the turn. Car horns were blaring and people were yelling out their windows at the trucker's outrageously inappropriate manoeuvre. Jan's car was sitting right behind the truck, and, as the rear end of the vehicle slowly came into view he was stunned to see the sign painted on the back in huge letters. It simply read: 'SCOTLAND'. 'Right in the middle of an incredibly busy *four way intersection!* In *Pretoria!*' he exclaimed. "'Ok God!'" I thought to myself, "I'm going!"

Providence and the enchantment of the everyday

Importantly, this kind of providence also took a much 'lower level' form – bumping into someone on Main street that you needed to speak to, getting your exhaust fixed quicker than expected, receiving a phone call seconds before you were about to leave the house, easily securing a space in a busy parking lot – all of these were 'read' as Godincidences, that is, as examples of God's sovereign provision in the life of the believer. 'There's no such thing as coincidence, only Godincidence!' people would tell me. What, then, is the connection between Godincidences and the world of material things? As I have hinted at already, the connection is a strong one. Indeed, the ethnographic moments described above were chosen to try and show how even the 'quintessentially spiritual' experience of divine providence is inescapably rooted in material processes. As Keane reminds us:

...the realism and intuitive power of objects often derives from indexicality, their apparent connection to the things they signify by virtue of a real relation of causality or conjunction. That is, they point to the presence of something (Keane 2006: 311).

Indexicality then, is simply a kind of pointing. But if objects 'point to the presence of something' (ibid.), what is it, exactly, that they point to? Well, in the ethnographic context that I have been discussing, they point to the material presence of God. Thus, God's omnipresence is not limited to a theological concept (a 'belief' in Keane's terms)

or to a somatic emotion but is experienced materially in and through washing machines and 18 wheeler trucks. Thus:

...because Christianity in whatever form it takes is embedded in ordinary practices, it creates recurrent practical means by which these concepts can be lived in concrete terms' (ibid.: 310).

Which is precisely my argument about the way in which providence operates in the world. Providence is embedded in the 'ordinary practices' of daily life – embedded in doing laundry or the daily commute, for example. And as such, providence is 'lived in concrete terms' through an attitude of expectancy to the point that:

...as material things, they are enmeshed in causality, registered in and induced by their forms [and] as forms they remain objects of experience (Keane 2008: 124).

But what kind of a world did the Christians of Gamrie inhabit in order for Godincidences to be a matter of fact part of everyday life? My basic argument here is that their world was an enchanted one, which, by providence, was made alive with a kind of magic. Importantly, enchantment was not only the effect that providence brings to bear upon the world – it was also the cause.

To explain the agency that enchantment has in the world we need only to look as far as our earlier examination of coincidence. What does the world have to be for it to be completely lacking in chance? It has to be a world totally driven by irresistible divine intention. The world, in other words, has to be fully and completely enchanted – otherwise the abolition of coincidence would be totally absurd. The agency of enchantment works its 'magic' by inscribing divine intention upon the world, and in so doing, necessitates the abolition of the category of coincidence. 'Now wasn't that amazing!' Betty said to me, eyes swelling with tears. Betty's discovery of the verse in the gutter *would* be pure serendipity if she did not live in a world enchanted by providence and Godincidence. But she did and it was.

Yet, my Christian informants did not only experience God as spiritually immanent, in the case of prayer, but also as materially immanent, in the things of this world. The enchantment of the world was felt and made known, as I have tried to show, in washing machines, U-turns and scraps of paper. Enchantment is both ‘cause’ and ‘effect’, or, in the language of semiotics, is both ‘sign’ and ‘referent’. And it is enchantment that ultimately answers the question ‘what does the world have to be for this to be so?’ Specifically, this world has to be several things:

First, it has to be a world governed by providence where ‘the people of God’ read and walk and talk and live with a sense of the utmost expectancy of having an encounter with the divine. Second, it has to be a world where coincidence is abolished and replaced by Godincidence; where divine foreordination – the irresistible intentionality of God – renders the personal details of everyday life as an intimate experience of (micro) predestination. Third, it has to be a world where God is brought close, not only through the religious rituals of preaching, reading scripture and praying, but in a way that allows God to be experienced as actually present, that is, as materially immanent, in washing machines, U-turns and so on. Fourth, finally, the world has to be made alive with a kind of magic – a magic that charges everyday life with deep spiritual significance; a magic that orders the world in such a way that it is totally lacking in chance, totally lacking in mistakes, totally lacking in the unintended. It has to be a world, in short, that is defined by enchantment.

It is enchantment that animates all the ethnography I have been speaking about so far. Aubry wasn’t presiding over the funeral of a woman who coincidentally ‘just happened’ to be the wife of the only ever Mission superintendent from Shetland; he was actually experiencing the hand of God moving him towards a divinely foreordained life of full time Christian service. And hence Betty’s tears over the verse in the gutter that she had kept all those years and was now showing to me; an object that was not in any sense disposable, ready to be scrapped, but was rather a material proof of the presence of the divine in her life; a kind of secondary textual incarnation that made God immanent to the point of being consubstantiated into the substance of a piece of an enchanted paper found in a gutter.

From this perspective, the disjuncture between received anthropological notions of Christianity as a religion of transcendence and the lived experience of my informants is striking. Cannell's summary of the received model is insightful:

God withdraws from man, and as a consequence man is left in a state of incompleteness that can be resolved only at death, when he will pass into the other world (Cannell 2006: 39)

What is most striking, then, is the total lack of this experience of divine withdrawal in the daily lives of my informants. Indeed, far from being an 'impossible religion' (ibid.) hopelessly caught between the incommensurable realms of the material and the spiritual, the Christianity that Aubry and Betty describe to us seems to be one where material immanence and spiritual transcendence are, in important respects, one and the same thing. What we see is not divine withdrawal but divine presence. Hence Betty's transcendent encounter with the immanence of God in a piece of paper in the gutter, and hence Aubry's immanent encounter with the transcendence of God in the offer of a new job. In this sense, both divine immanence and material transcendence were experienced as daily realities, that is, just as God was experienced as materially present in everyday objects, so too for objects, which acted to index the presence of God.

But troublingly, God was by no means described as one who had a monopoly over enchantment. Demons too were experienced as a reality that had to be lived with and battled against. It is to this experience of 'spiritual attack' and the immanence of the Devil that I now turn to.

Evil Spirits and Devil Worshipers

John's first encounter with evil spirits was when he was in working with a church in Mintlaw. Not long after he had come to pastor the church there, a local woman called Moira started to attend gospel meetings. During one of these meetings she began to 'manifest' that she was possessed by evil spirits by screaming and writhing on the floor uncontrollably. After a while, a neighbour was forced to take her home.

The next morning the neighbour phoned John urging him to come to Moira's aid; she had grown worse overnight saying she was terrified that the evil spirits within her were trying to kill her by throwing her down the stairs. He agreed to try and help. Having removed all the children and animals from the house and 'set the church to prayer', he was ready to perform the exorcism. He and a church elder prayed for Moira and the spirits began to manifest – not just one evil spirit but many. And try as they might, they could not cast them out; only one evil spirit came out of Moira and far from being banished, it actually attacked John, physically fixing itself to his side, causing him to roll in pain.

John then entered a period of fasting and prayer – he planned to 'seek the Lord' until he got an answer. The next day John phoned Moira's neighbour and said that the Lord had 'given him the key' and that he was willing to meet with Moira again, but on one condition. She must tell them *everything* about her life and past sins, 'not because we want to know, but so the Devil didn't have anything to hide behind' he explained. Moira agreed and they arranged to meet the following week.

When they met, Moira told them about all the sins she could not forgive herself for. John was then able to pray for her, and this time with dramatic effect. He described how he counted 47 evil spirits that were cast out of her, with every one of them identifying themselves individually – 'hate', 'lust', 'anger', 'death'; they were all there, with different voices and different expressions'. As they came out, Moira was vomiting up what John called 'slime' from somewhere inside her body but was keen to tell me that it wasn't coming from her stomach; 'it wasn't food, it wasn't drink, it was *like* bile but it *wasn't* bile. She was actually bringing it up into a bucket' he said. Moira said she could feel the spirits crawling up her back like worms, fighting to get out of her body. And in a matter of minutes they were gone and she was completely free.

What 'typical significance' can be taken from Moira and her 47 evil spirits? The first point is surely the most obvious and perhaps one of the more central for our focus upon spiritual immanence, namely, the Devil was experienced, not only as being real, but also as close at hand. Importantly, out of his realness came real effects – to make one sweat and shake and cry and writhe and scream and vomit, and, indeed, to fear for one's life. Local understandings of drug addiction are an interesting case in point.

Several of my elderly Christian informants often told me that the Devil had brought financial prosperity to the village as a way of causing young fishermen to forget their need of God. Next, the Devil was said to have brought drugs and drug dealers into the area. Boys in their late teens with huge disposable incomes were said to be demonically tempted by the allure of heroin, soon falling into addiction. Such addiction was frequently described as a kind of possession. ‘The Devil just got a hold of their lives and *completely controlled* them’; ‘they are in the clutches of the Evil One now’; ‘it’s like they’re possessed by demons – they canna help themselves. They just *crave* the drugs’ – such was the local Christian rhetoric surrounding drug addiction.

Those – like Danny I mentioned in Chapter IV – who gave ‘testimony’ about how they had been ‘released’ from addiction by becoming ‘born-again’ Christians, often spoke of their ‘healing’ from drugs as being akin to an exorcism. Danny and others were often described as being ‘bound to a demon’ pre-conversion and then ‘freed’ from it post-conversion. Within the AoG’s drug rehab programme in Fraserburgh, this language of ‘healing’, ‘possession’, ‘bound’ and ‘freed’ would almost always be accompanied by the laying on of hands in prayer and speaking in tongues. While these specific practices were not common in Gamrie, the language that accompanied them certainly was. And it was through the deployment of such language that local people came to experience the enchanting effect of demonic encounters in the everyday.

In this sense, Moira and Danny’s experiences were understood by local Christians as being similar in important respects. Not only was the Devil said to be real – he was also said to be immanent, that is, made ‘manifest’, in expressions of the face, in shrieking and in falling to the ground, or through demonic bodily cravings for heroin. Yet, the Devil was experienced as being immanent, not, as discussed previously, by the pure and perfect ordering of divine providence, but by its opposite, that is, by the chaotic *disordering* of what my informants called ‘spiritual attack’. While our focus upon bodies and words remains, then, it is by moving from a discussion of ‘providence’ to ‘spiritual attack’ that I have chosen to frame the discussion that follows.

Spiritual attack was experienced, then, as an inversion of divine providence. This is not to say that divine providence and spiritual attack did not have anything in common typologically. What was inverted, then, was not their enchanted categorical hallmark, for the abolition of coincidence remained unchanged, but rather its cosmological intent. Thus, where divine providence was about God's benevolent direction and control over human affairs, spiritual attack was about Satan's malevolent interference in and manipulation of believer's lives.

Much of the explanation of this can be drawn directly from local uses of the theological concepts themselves: providence is about divine provision and spiritual attack is about demonic assault. Providence grants an exceedingly intimate experience of the divine that the believer delights in whereas spiritual attack imposes a terrifyingly personal and grossly abusive experience of the demonic that the believer fears. Providence is about experiences of Godincidence. Spiritual attack is essentially malicious spiritual vandalism. The differences clearly exist, then, but feel somewhat self explanatory. Providence is holy and spiritual attack is evil. Where we can then, without too much difficulty, imagine the ways in which God and the Devil are said to be different, it seems that their similarities – in terms of the ways in which they operate in the world – are made all the more intriguing and significant. Some more ethnographic detail seems fitting.

One night in Gamrie when visiting a friend for dinner, one of the other guests, a man called Dave, began to describe how the Bible college he attended, and the town in which it was based, had come under persistent attack from Satanists. This, he assured me, was because the Holy Spirit was powerfully present in the vicinity, causing the Devil and his followers to attack the work of the college. Dave went on to give several graphic examples. Once, when taking an early morning stroll down by the river, he saw a man who appeared to be talking to himself while leaning over the railings of a footbridge. Dave stopped and asked him what he was doing and the man turned to him calmly and said he was cursing the river. Dave asked him what he meant and was simply told that he was praying to Satan, asking him to poison the river so that all the wildlife would die and the water would become poisonous to drink. The man went on to explain that there were several people like him scattered across the town at that very moment praying various satanic curses upon the area.

Dave described other instances. He told us how on many occasions the Bible college itself had been attacked by Devil worshippers. They would often find pentagrams carved into the lawn of the college. These Satanic symbols would invariably have decapitated birds placed in the middle of them. They would also frequently find that the trees on campus had spools of cassette tape woven through the branches accompanied with menacing notes stating how the tape contained recorded curses spoken against those studying at the college. Dave was keen to point out that these were common occurrences. Iain, while obviously voicing concern, really did not seem as shocked as I was. When it was time for me to leave for a prayer meeting I said my goodbyes and left with my head spinning. Driving up the brae with Noel, the FPCU minister, I got the chance to get his take on what I had just heard. He seemed even less surprised than Iain, saying that he could very easily imagine such things happening in England: ‘You see Joe, when you turn your back on God as a nation, it leaves a vacuum’. And with that said as seemingly adequate explanation, we drove into the church car park and got ready for the meeting.

It seems that if we want to understand what Dave was saying (and why it provoked the non-reactions that it did from Iain and Noel) then we must return to our earlier question about the structural similarities between divine providence and spiritual attack, and particularly to that of expectancy. What does ‘expectancy’ have to do with spiritual attack? An initial answer came to me when hearing John preach at Braehead one Sunday afternoon; he was speaking – again from personal experience – of demonic attack while ‘working for the gospel’ in the northeast:

And you say well why does God allow this [spiritual attack] to happen? We don’t know – we just know that it is part of the cost... I was being attacked in my sleep at night. I was wakening up in cold shivers in bed shaking and... all we could do was pray to God ... and it was very real. And lots of people that you speak to that are moving [in the power of the Holy Spirit and] are trying to break through into the kingdom of darkness, [they] come under attack and it’s one of the things to expect if you are launching out into mission... [because] you are going into warfare.

Demonic attack, John tells us, ‘is part of the cost [of] trying to break through into the kingdom of darkness... it’s just ‘one of the things to expect’. But why? For John, the

answer is as obvious as the question is facile – because ‘you are going into warfare’. The Christian life is a ‘spiritual battle’, local believers told me, meaning that spiritual attack, like providence, was not only strongly marked by the intentionality of supernatural forces, but was to be expected.

But my description so far has been too focused on the dramatic – a woman vomiting slime while having 47 evil spirits cast out of her; Satanists carving pentagrams into the ground adorned with decapitated birds – these things were reported to me as having happened, but spiritual attack was also spoken about as having a more ‘ordinary’ character. Thus, while spiritual attack was described as being akin to a war, that is, it was said to be acute and episodic, it was also spoken of as a ‘daily struggle’ – as a chronic and persistent undermining of one’s Christian ‘walk of faith’. The Devil’s activities were not said to be limited to some extreme end of spiritual pyrotechnics, but more typically experienced as belonging to the realm of the everyday. I want to highlight this point with two ethnographic examples – one about preaching and one about prayer.

It was a Sunday in late July and I was sitting in the Kirk with Iain. It was a visiting minister who led the service. As he introduced each of his eight main points (it was going to be a long sermon apparently) I noticed out of the corner of my eye that Iain began to sway a little. The preacher launched into his sermon: ‘they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching’ he enthused. Iain nodded forward and then jerked his head upright. ‘They devoted themselves to fellowship and the breaking of bread’. Iain’s eyes slowly closed. ‘Things were happening practically...’ Iain began to snore very quietly. ‘And they were filled with joy!’ I gave Iain a dig with my elbow and, as if in slow motion, he opened his eyes and lifted his Bible a little more upright in his hands. And then his head began to drift down again. The two of us continued this double act for the full forty five minutes of the sermon. And then a closing prayer and a hymn, and, after taking our turn to shake hands with the minister, we were out in the fresh air.

Iain came over for lunch and we chatted as I prepared the pork and potatoes. When we were ready to eat we sat at the table in the kitchen and I asked Iain to say the grace and was surprised by what happened next. Rather than pray a brief blessing upon the food, he

prayed a long and rather rambling prayer asking God to forgive him for repeatedly falling asleep in church. When the ‘amen’ came, food had not even been mentioned.

As we ate, Iain told me how he thought his sleepiness in church was the result of spiritual attack. He never normally fell asleep in church, he told me, but in recent weeks he had repeatedly done so. Nor did he feel that he was particularly tired before church or even during the first part of the service. He only ever felt sleepy right at the point where the sermon was due to begin. And what was worse, as soon as he was out the church all feelings of lethargy left him. This pattern, Iain explained with real frustration, had repeated itself again and again over the last while, namely that he was falling asleep just at the point where God’s Word was being expounded and that this amounted to clear evidence that the Devil was attacking him. He then looked to me for comment. After a pause, I rather hesitantly suggested that he might want to ‘pray against’ tiredness before church in future. He seemed to think this would be a good idea and we left it at that.

* * *

Despite being widely regarded in local Christian circles as ‘a real prayer warrior’, Mary confessed that she often felt nervous when engaging in public prayer, explaining to me that when she prayed out loud in meetings she always needed to start by ‘leaping off from something’ – a verse of scripture, or, more usually, a few lines from a hymn. I remember one particular prayer meeting which started as normal with the singing of a hymn, and, after discussing matters for prayer we fell silent and bowed our heads. As was often the case, Mary started us off. She quoted a few words of her intended verse, maybe half a line, and then fell silent. A long pause followed. Margaret, having recognised the hymn that Mary was struggling to remember, softly whispered the next few words into her ear. Before long Mary was praying again, albeit with a slightly wounded and hesitant tone. This rather start-stop quality persisted throughout the two hour gathering, and with Mary rapidly losing confidence, she prayed less and less as the meeting trudged on.

Mary had no doubt what had happened – she had had a direct experience of spiritual attack. As she recounted the events to me in her kitchen a few days later, she explained that the Devil stole the words the Holy Spirit gave her from right inside her heart, leaving her ‘with nothing to leap off from’ just at the moment when she was about to pray.

I describe these two seemingly trivial episodes so as to make an implicit comparison of them, with, for example, the experience of vomiting demonic slime during an exorcism, in order to simply suggest that spiritual attack has the potential to permeate all aspects of one's lived Christian experience. That is to say, the Devil assaults the Christian not only through possession by evil spirits or by sending Satanists to attack with curses, but also by making God's people sleepy during sermons or absent minded in prayer.

But what of bad luck? Why can Iain's fatigue and Mary's forgetfulness not simply be explained away as a series of unfortunate events? The answer is found by returning to our earlier discussion of Godincidence. In the same way that my informants frequently asserted to me that there was 'no such thing as coincidence', this abolition extended to bad luck just as much as it did to good. The two explanations left open to my informants were either divine testing or demonic attack. God could (and did) make bad things happen 'in order to bring his people back to himself' my informants explained to me. Mary was particularly aware of such events, not only in her own life but also world affairs, speaking at length on many occasions about how swine flu, the recession, the MPs expense scandal and the crisis over homosexual ministers in the Kirk had been brought to us by God. 'I think God is ruffling up the waters to bring people to their knees in prayer. Yes, I think God is laying the foundations for revival' she would muse to me as we sat by her electric heater drinking tea. Divine testing, then, was the unfolding of pre-ordained suffering (of any kind) designed to show people their helplessness without God as their protector and provider.

Equally, the abolition of the possibility of simple 'bad luck' meant that spiritual attack was everywhere. Such demonically ordained suffering was not just about the extraordinary or the extreme, it was also about the understated and the everyday – a husband and wife bickering; a move towards paraphrasing scripture rather than translating it literally, reduced EU fishing quotas, unruly behaviour in school classrooms – these were all deliberate attacks of the Evil One and were experienced as such by my Christian informants. In this sense, the enchantment of the world had a totalising effect – nothing was left to chance because the agentive powers of God and the Devil were always at work in one respect or another. Crucially, however, this did not strip my

informants of their agency. Insofar as human souls were the spoils of war, it was humans and their bodies that acted as the battleground. Indeed, the ‘gospel message’ called on those who heard it to be decision makers. Thus, as we saw in Chapter IV, being ‘born again’ was a choice, just as rejecting the preacher and his call to repentance was a choice. Deciding which experiences were to be categorised as divine testing, and which were demonic attack, was a further agential act. Simple logic often prevailed; God would not make one fall asleep during a sermon so such fatigue must be demonic. Where no obvious explanation was available (as with the global recession) it was through the deployment of words – in prayer, Bible reading and Christian conversation – that authorship was established.

But what about the realm of the material? Did *things* play the same role in spiritual attack as they did in providence? By developing Cannell’s critique of received anthropological notions that Christianity is first and foremost a religion of transcendence, I want to suggest that objects did indeed play a key role in grounding local experiences of the demonic. At the danger of returning to a rather skewed emphasis on the ‘super exotic’, I want to highlight how this occurred by returning to another one of John’s sermons, not simply to comment upon his words (although I do think this will be helpful) but to show how these words then stirred my friend Billy to decisive action.

Their wicked stuff

Now we maybe have never seen Satan or an evil spirit but we know they are there because ... we see the effects of the enemy around us... I have been in meetings where people have come and they have got prayed for and God had touched them, seriously touched them, but they haven’t got rid of their *stuff*, their wicked stuff...

The very first night [of a gospel campaign] a young man came into the meeting and at the end of the service when the appeal was given he stayed behind and he asked to be saved... he *genuinely* repented and we believe that he became a new person in Jesus that night...

[Afterwards] he came and... says could you come round to my hoose, I've got something to show you, he says, and I'm frightened to go home. He had brought some things into his home and he was frightened to go back because what he had brought into his house was *so evil*... And I says ok, I'll come round with you... So what he did was he went upstairs and he come back down and he had a carrier bag full of... old LP records. And he says could you take these records away and destroy them? And I says why fits wrong with them like? He says these records are worship songs to Satan. ... and he says I don't want them in my hoose, I'm frightened... And I says well I'm not taking them in my hoose. Well, he says, I want them destroyed properly, he says, I don't just want to put them in a bin in case someone finds them he says, they're *so bad*. So I says ok... And I put them in the boot of the car with the idea that I would go and dump them the next morning.

So, while they were in the boot of the car, before I got a chance to dump them, Phyllis got attacked by evil spirits we believe – something came into our house and attacked us. And even though we believe in God's protection... by hanging onto these records ... we were open for Satan to come and attack us, as a family, physically... You know, if we even open the door, a little chink, for the devil... he will come in...

Now when we become Christians, what sorta *stuff* do we still hang onto? What sorta movies? What sorta magazines? What sorta music? What sorta *things* do we meditate upon which is going to open up our minds to the enemy? Because remember, our minds is the battle field of the enemy... If you have been in the Free Masons, do you destroy all your artefacts: your robes, your books, your medallions? If you have been involved in witchcraft do you take all your paraphernalia and your *stuff* and burn it, according to what the scripture teaches? Or do you put it in a box and put it up the loft somewhere, and then you wonder why you can't get any blessing? I believe it's possible, even as Christians, we can bring *curses* upon ourselves... it's possible, I believe.

As I was saying my goodbyes and about to leave the hall, Billy, the leading man at the Braehead fellowship came alongside me and urged me to come back to his house with him and his wife. John's story about the Satanic LPs had reminded him, he told me, about

some things a friend had given him that he needed me to look over. He seemed genuinely fearful so I eventually agreed. As we walked to his house he told me that this friend had given him a box of VHS cassettes which contained teaching from some unknown religious group. Billy did not know anything about the videos at the time and just assumed that they contained 'good Christian ministry'. However, after a series of unsettling spiritual conversations with this friend, he had become unsure about their orthodoxy. Billy was clear that he did not want the cassettes in his house if they were 'full of false teaching', especially, after all, if they might bring demonic attack upon his family.

We put one of the videos in, and, after a few anxious moments of the three of us staring at a flickering screen, the phrase 'Adventist Global Communication Network' popped up. The videos were probably Seventh Day Adventist, I suggested. Billy had seen enough and turned his back on the screen. Betty then switched off the TV and I typed the phrase into Google. We quickly managed to confirm that the tapes were indeed Seventh Day Adventist. I knew little about them, I confessed, beyond the fact that some evangelicals believed them to be an apostate sect, largely on the basis that their members held to the teachings of a modern day prophetess in addition to the Bible. I scanned a few web pages looking for specific Adventist doctrine and came across a reference that suggested that the group taught that Christ had a fallen nature.

This was more than enough for Billy. He said he wanted the tapes burned. I suggested that if he wanted to get rid of them he could just throw them away. He shook his head saying that someone might find them and watch them and be led astray. In that case, I offered, we could easily pull out and cut up the magnetic tape; this would make them unwatchable while saving the need to burn them – burning them, I said, would create an awful smell that his neighbours might object to. But Billy was quite sure what needed to be done. He must burn them, and tonight. He had an old oil drum at the back of the garden he would burn them in and that would be the end of that. It seemed best to leave him to it so I made my excuses and went home to bed.

I popped over the next morning to see Billy and Betty to deliver some sermon recordings to them. Billy greeted me and told me all about how he had burned the tapes once I had left. He had had to use quite a bit of petrol to get them going, but once they were lit they

burned well. ‘What an amount of black smoke they made! They burned for oors!’ Billy really did look relieved; ‘still, they’re gone noo’ he said with a reassured tone.

Conclusions: Of bodies and things

As with providence, local experiences of spiritual attack force us to confront the materiality of bodies. The Devil possessed Moira and threatened to kill her by throwing her down the stairs. She screamed and fell to the ground and shook. She felt the evil spirits crawl up her back. And she eventually vomited them out in the form of slime. Moira’s body was ever present in the story of her own deliverance. The Devil went into Mary’s heart to steal the words she had been meditating on before the prayer meeting. Her head was caused to forget, her mouth was made to close and her tongue was stopped still. In many respects Iain’s experience was the same. His entire body was suddenly overcome with fatigue. His eyes closed, his head dropped and his breathing slowed to a soft snore – he fell asleep. Importantly, these bodily experiences were not incidental to the outworking of spiritual attack – they were not just fleshy window dressing for an ethereal encounter. Rather these experiences of ‘the flesh’ *were* the spiritual attack. Spiritual attack is not played out merely through the materiality of body, but *in* it and *because* of it. The body, then, is not just location but also event; it is not just secondary facilitation but primary occurrence.

But not only does the Devil possess people’s bodies with demons and evil spirits, he is also experienced as indwelling LPs, video tapes, Masonic robes and so on. Thus, while John stated that ‘our minds is [sic] the battle field of the enemy’, he also strongly asserted how the weapons employed in this battle were and are unavoidably material. It seems helpful to return to John’s words of warning here if we want to grasp the full import of what my informants called ‘the things of this world’:

If you have been involved in witchcraft do you take all your paraphernalia and your *stuff* and burn it... or do you put it in a box ... [in] the loft somewhere, and then ... wonder why you can’t get any blessing?

In this sense, a box of witchcraft paraphernalia put up in the loft still exerts a power over its owner and their household – it stops ‘blessing’, presumably from the Holy Spirit. It is not enough, therefore, to reject these *practices* and relegate their *material* traces to a box in the loft. No, rather, the box of ‘wicked stuff’ must be burned ‘according to what the scripture teaches’. Why? Because materials matter; things matter; objects matter. But why? Because they are powerful. And what (or rather where) is their power? Their power is located within their very materiality, that is, inside their ‘thinginess’ *as objects*. Objects, then, have an agency outside of human intentionality, that is, they have effects that are independent of their usage by people. Satanic LPs sitting in the boot of a car cause a woman to tear tendons in her leg as she tries to serve tea to her husband. Boxes of witchcraft paraphernalia left in a loft can hold back blessing from an entire household. Seventh Day Adventist videos kept in a shoe box in a basement threaten to bring unknown spiritual attack. And the solution? Destroy their materiality and in so doing take away their power.

This observation forces us to take seriously Cannell’s (2006: 14) suggestion that Christianity is not simply a religion of transcendence. What we see in local experiences of the materiality of both ‘providence’ and ‘attack’, then, is not the ‘radical discontinuity’ of an ‘impossible religion’ (ibid.: 39), but rather its exact opposite, that is, a radical *continuity* between spirit and flesh, word and object, seen and unseen, this world and the next, and, ultimately, between transcendence and immanence. This continuity is such that it becomes, again, a kind of enchanted conflation. Those LPs, those VHS cassettes – they needed to be burned not simply because they pointed to the external material immanence of a transcendent devil (although they did do that) but because they were themselves the immanence of Satan. What we see, then, is not so much Satan in flesh, but in plastic, that is, as incarnated (to use a theological term that clearly has wider resonances) within the materiality of everyday objects that become enchanted (made alive) by the immanence of transcendence. Thus, as with providence, not only are incidences of demonic attack rooted in materiality, but so is their ability to bestow a sense of spiritual immanence. Thus, where God’s omnipresence was experienced in and through washing machines and 18-wheeler trucks, so too was the omnipresence of Satan felt through LPs and pentagrams and Masonic robes and VHS cassettes. It is here that we see the clearest

convergence of Cannell's view of the immanence of Christianity and Keane's view of materiality. As Keane states:

Religions may not always demand beliefs... [but] will always invoke material forms. It is in this materiality that they are part of experience... provoke responses... have public lives and enter into ongoing chains of causes and consequences (Keane 2008: 124).

And again, just like providence and the experience of Godincidence, spiritual attack is given a life outside linguistic utterances in so far as the objects that actually constitute these experiences themselves have an independent material (and, for Cannell, *immanent*) existence. Keane's point is made again:

'...even in its most abstracted and transcendent, the human subject cannot free itself from objectification. It retains a body, it continues to work on, transact and possess objects' (Keane 2006: 321).

And it could only really be this way in so far as the Devil and his demons – just like Christ and his people – have a real material existence, both in bodies (think here of crucified flesh and demonic possession) and in objects (washing machines and witchcraft paraphernalia). Spiritual attack, like providence, not only 'retains a body' (ibid.) but also 'work[s] on... objects' (ibid.) with the effect (and again we notice the same in providence) that spiritual immanence is made an undeniably real and startlingly everyday experience. Where God is brought close by Godincidence, Satan is brought close through spiritual attack, close enough, in fact, to make you fall asleep in church, tear the tendons in your leg or cause evil to befall your family because of a box of videos in the basement.

The Devil, it seems, really could not be any more immanent; his closeness was such that all he needed was the slightest opportunity and the result would be disaster: 'You know, if we even open the door a little chink, for the Devil to come in, he will come in' John cautioned. Again, what we see, in Cannell's terms, is not 'radical discontinuity' (2006: 14) but a radical continuity. What I am speaking of here is the continuity between transcendence and immanence that enchantment brought to bear upon the world of my

Christian informants. I have argued that the failure to see this enchantment is a failure to take seriously Cannell's challenge to the anthropology of religion that:

If transcendence is not necessarily exclusively Christian, then it is even more clearly true to say that Christianity is not exclusively a religion of transcendence (Cannell 2006: 41)

Spiritual attack, then, acts to secure the experience of immanence – it makes the Devil and his angels not only an embodied and material reality, but a reality that is so close that a demonic encounter is neither surprising nor even particularly shocking, but is rather eminently expected.

As with divine providence, the local experience of spiritual attack shows how the life of the Christian, when glossed as a 'spiritual battle' comes to resemble an enchanted struggle against the Devil. Thus, where my Christian informants expected to experience the perfect ordering of divine providence through *God's* immanence, they also expected to experience the disordering of spiritual attack on the basis of their expectation of the experience of *demonic* immanence. The Devil was brought close to the point that everyday encounters – forgetting a hymn or feeling sleepy in church – were appropriated back into the realm of the supernatural and consubstantiated into material experiences of the presence of spiritual reality in one's everyday life. Every struggle, every misfortune, every mishap, became a potential bearer of intense religious significance, that is, it became a bearer of the immanent transcendence of God and the Devil. Because 'there is no such thing as coincidence' there were really only two categories left open: providence and spiritual attack. The effect was essentially the same – life was experienced as enchanted. Having considered the *immanence* of God and the Devil as experienced through the daily expectation of providence and spiritual attack, let us now turn our attention to the *imminence* of God and the Devil as experienced through the daily expectation of the end of the world.

Chapter VII

Eschatology

*I am waiting for the dawning
of the bright and blessed day,[...]
I am waiting for the coming
of the Lord who died for me;
O His words have thrilled my spirit,
'I will come again for Thee.'
I can almost hear his footfall,
on the threshold of the door,
and my heart, my heart is longing
to be with Him evermore*

(Popular hymn, Gamrie)

*The fate of our time is characterised by rationalisation and intellectualisation
and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'. Precisely the ultimate and
most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental
realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human
relations.*

(Weber 1978a: 155)

Where the previous chapter discussed the nearness of God and the Devil within the daily experience of Gamrie's Christians, this chapter concerns their soon arrival within that same experience. Where my analytical focus remains fixed upon 'signs', my ethnographic focus shifts from highly personal encounters in the lives of my informants to their own understandings of the wider cosmological battle that they imagine is being played out between the forces of good and evil. If we are to come to terms with the ways in which these imaginings are experienced as real, it first seems needful to consider some local expressions of that experience.

God and the Devil are ‘soon’

Walking down Gamrie brae early one afternoon, I met Ann, a woman in her sixties who attended the Braehead Hall with her husband Steven. She invited me in to see Steven who was ill – he would be glad of the visit she told me, so in I went. The afternoon passed with Steven chatting to me about his failing health and his past working life. As he finished recounting his story, he turned to me and said something that struck me as rather remarkable:

What is it exactly that you would...? [**Stops himself**] Now, we all ken that we’re living in the last days, but *if you get to, ken, if the Lord doesna come back*, what is it that you would like to dee eventually [after you finish your studies]?

Stevens’s comments – more than his actual question – frame nicely what I want to discuss in this chapter, that is, the idea that we are living in the last days (frequently expressed as ‘the last of the last days’) and that as such, all questions about the future, no matter how mundane, need to be qualified eschatologically. It will be my argument in this chapter that the above ethnographic encounter, as with those that follow below, need to be understood in terms of the way in which they frame public life as an enchanted struggle between God and the Devil, with the Christian placed awkwardly in the middle. This chapter, then, unlike the previous one, does not concern the way that the self relates to the world (asking ‘how does my religious experience constitute the world I live in?’), but with rather the opposite, namely, how the world relates to the self (asking ‘how does the world constitute my religious experience?’). To this end, my discussion here takes as its primary ethnographic object discussions I had with my informants, not about washing machines, but all those multifarious ‘signs of the times’ that made Steven’s qualification to his question about my future plans make sense to him and those he worshipped alongside. Crucially for my argument here, the great majority of these ‘signs’ were found in the realm of the political, and most commonly concerned both Israel and the European Union. It is these wider geo-political forces, then, that go well beyond Weber’s ‘brotherliness’ (1978a: 155), which provides much of the substance for my analysis.

Yet, it is important to note, as I will show below, that these geo-political forces were not divorced from ‘the transcendental realm of mystic life’ (ibid.) in quite the way that

Weber imagined they would be as a result of capitalism taking root across much of Europe. Thus, what follows in both the ethnographic description and theoretical analysis, is, of course, inevitably less cut-and-dried than any public/private or personal/political dichotomy would suggest. Clearly, then, the two research questions mentioned above overlap to a considerable extent, and, as a result, the sociological truism that I and the world co-constitute each other needs constantly bearing in mind. As such, my separation of the material that makes up both this chapter and the previous one is based on something of an oversimplification, namely that the public and private are in some senses discrete entities that can be discussed in isolation from each other. Yet, it is an oversimplification, I hope, that clarifies more than it obscures, inasmuch as any Weberian ‘ideal type’ would seek to do.

To summarise so far, in the previous chapter I argued that:

Providence and spiritual attack, in abolishing coincidence, established ‘Godincidence’, securing the experience of *immanence*, thereby enchanting the world by bringing God and the Devil *near*.

In this chapter, my argument will be that:

Eschatology, in addressing the near future, established signs of the times, securing the experience of *imminence*, thereby enchanting the world by bringing God and the Devil *soon*.

Without wanting to pre-empt my argument too much, the analysis that follows hinges on maintaining a distinction between ‘immanence’ and ‘imminence’ as typified by the distinction between ‘near’ and ‘soon’. Essentially, where immanence is fundamentally *spatial*, with God and the Devil being experienced as materially and corporeally near, my argument here is that imminence is *temporal* with God and the Devil being experienced as soon. While I am aware that the phrase ‘God and the Devil are soon’ may sound, if not obtuse, then certainly a little awkward, I nonetheless want to retain its use here, for reasons that will become clearer, I hope, further throughout the argument.

I have chosen to divide the chapter into two main parts. Part one addresses how local people understood the political eschatology of God through their interest in and support for Israel, both as a geo-political entity and as ‘Gods chosen people’. Part two addresses the political eschatology of the Devil through local people’s critique of the European Union, particularly with regards to its management of fisheries and the perceived implications this had on food sovereignty. I am aware that this division may appear, at first reading at least, to emerge from a rather reductionist secularist logic that not only views politics as a discreet sphere separable from religion, but also as one that can be explicated in isolation to other factors, such as economics and demographics. This, however, is explicitly not my intent, and, as the chapter progresses, I make much of the interconnectedness of politics and economics – particularly by returning to fishing. Thus, in speaking of ‘political eschatology’, my aim is to show how politics is unavoidably implicated in the religious world of enchantment. But before I move to discuss the specific eschatological role of Israel and the EU, let me first go into some more detail about two aspects of my argument – first the relationship between eschatology and what Guyer (2007) has referred to as the ‘near future’, and second, the relationship between imminence and local ideas about ‘signs of the times’.

Eschatology and the evacuation of the ‘near future’?

In an important article entitled ‘Prophecy and the near future’, Guyer, commenting on macroeconomic and evangelical understandings of time, describes what she refers to as ‘a strange evacuation of the temporal frame of the ‘near future’’ (2007: 409). All that matters, according to this relationship to time, is the now and the ultimate end – what Guyer refers to in another context as ‘enforced presentism’ and ‘fantasy futurism’ (2007: 410). The temporal effects of this approach are stark: a ‘shift in temporal framing [that] has involved a double move, towards both very short and very long sightedness, with a symmetrical evacuation of the near past and the near future (2007: 410). ‘What one sees now’, Guyer continues, ‘is not so much a break as a major shift composed of a multitude of small ruptures’ (2007: 410). Crucially, as a result of these ruptures, ‘the world itself falls increasingly into the disciplines of a punctuated time that fills the gap between an instantaneous present and an altogether different distant future’ (2007: 417). In this formulation, the ‘time-line’ is both utterly polarised and radically compressed in the same

breath; all that exists with any certainty, in the rhetoric of many an evangelical preacher, is ‘*tonight!*’ and ‘*eternity!*’ These two temporalities, which, in salvific and eschatological terms could not be further apart (think here of the incommensurability of ‘worldly’ suffering and heavenly deliverance), are, in another sense, actually next in line to each other. Indeed, as the epigraph to this chapter reminds us, Gamrie’s Christians are still forced to inhabit something of the near future (which, Guyer states, ‘cannot disappear altogether’ (2007: 411)) if simply as a matter of ‘waiting for the coming’ of the Messiah whose ‘footfall’ can be heard ‘on the threshold of the door’. The near future, inasmuch as it exists at all, exists as a time of waiting. In order to bring this ‘evacuation’ (Guyer 2007: 409) of the near future into sharper focus, I want to turn to consider a specific ethnographic example.

During one of my many pre-fieldwork visits to Gamrie, my father and I attended a gospel service at the OB hall one winter evening. I don’t remember a thing about what the preacher said, and having taken no proper notes during the sermon, I very much doubt I ever will. Yet one small moment I observed that night persuaded me beyond reasonable doubt that this was the village in which I would eventually live to conduct my doctoral research. The moment happened at the start of the service, just after the congregation had sung a few hymns to ‘warm us up on this cold night’, when a man (who I later came to know as ‘Jimmer’) stood up to announce the meetings that were planned for the week ahead. There would be a prayer meeting on Wednesday evening, a Bible reading on Friday evening, a breaking of bread service on Sunday morning, a ministry meeting on Sunday afternoon and the gospel service on Sunday night. What happened next struck me at the time as utterly ‘exotic’, but now, I realise, sounded entirely mundane to most of those present: ‘Now brethren’, Jimmer said, ‘we make these announcements every week, but of course *it’s only if the Lord will*. We might not be here next week because the Lord might have returned to take us home’. And with that said, he took his seat.

The similarity here with what Guyer speaks of in her own analysis of ‘evangelical time’, while striking, is perhaps not surprising given the degree to which evangelical Protestantism is shaped by and reliant upon globalised processes (Castells 2004, Coleman 2000, Harding 2000). Indeed, Guyer could just as well be speaking about the Christians of Gamrie as American evangelicals when she states:

For evangelical Christians, the interim between the first and second coming of the Messiah is the time in which present life is lived... Current church leadership works out the implications for life in the present, *in an enduring attitude of expectant waiting* (Guyer 2007: 414. Emphasis added).

It is clearly also true that evangelicalism is itself a globalising process – all a Protestant missionary really needs is words, that is, a Bible and an ability to speak the local language. As Coleman (2000) has shown, such a highly portable religion carries with it (not only in space, but also across time) the ability to transform ‘local’ perspectives and practices by conforming them (albeit in part) to a more general view of ‘The Word’. Regardless, it is the common denominator of waiting which characterises much of my Christian informants’ experience of the near future.

But in what sense can the near future be said to remain inhabited, and thus still part of one’s daily experience of the present? It seems to me that what Jimmer was talking about was not simply an experiential withdrawal from the near future (‘we might not be here next week...’), but also a denial of the definitiveness of future orientated human agency (‘it’s *only* if the *Lord* will’) with the effect that human purposes were rendered null unless occurring in the immediate present. Thus, where human future-making was denied in the near term (‘we make these announcements every week, *but...*’), what we will see, in the lives of my Christian friends, is that the near future nonetheless remained an essential part of their eschatological experience. In this sense, far from being evacuated (Guyer 2007: 409) or devalued (Crapanzano 2007: 424) the near future was seen as holding the key to unlocking the (‘yet to be revealed’) eschaton and thus the entire timetable of the cosmos.

Unlike our analysis of coincidence in the previous chapter, the near future was not abolished but rather addressed directly as the experiential bridge between Guyer’s ‘enforced presentism’ and ‘fantasy futurism’ (2007: 410). This is the case insofar as waiting existed as only half of the ‘spiritual’ equation; the Christians of Gamrie were not eschatologically idle during what they themselves referred to as ‘the waiting time’ but rather engaged in the busy task of watching. Further, this activity of watching was crucial in establishing an attitude of expectancy – an attitude that formed a central plank in my

analysis of ‘providence’ and ‘spiritual attack’ and is given a similarly important role in this chapter. The role of expectancy has also been noted by other commentators. Crapanzano, in response to Guyer’s paper on the near future argues:

The “end” ends earthly time, that singular gap that stretches, as evangelicals put it, between eternity past and eternity future... Although progression is evident in God’s dispensations, in dispensational Christianity, it is centred on a wholly exceptional event, Christ’s coming, which marks the beginning of the final dispensation... and offers the possibility of salvation. It is this point that conjoins cosmic and individual history, but before salvation and world ending can occur, Christ must reappear. *His second coming is at once anticipated and expected* (Crapanzano 2007: 423. Emphasis added).

One of Crapanzano’s questions that stems from this observation is also fundamental to this chapter, namely: ‘how does this [eschatological] picture... colour their everyday experiences of time?’ The answer I offered with regards to ‘providence’ and ‘spiritual attack’ is also the answer I offer here, namely, that of enchantment. Where Crapanzano agrees that this is the case, arguing: ‘doubtless... believers are enchanted by a transcending temporal orientation’ (2007: 423), the reason he gives for how this comes about is different from the one I will argue. Thus, where Crapanzano turns to soteriology as that which forges the relationship between eschatology and enchantment, stating: ‘enchantment... is facilitated by the promise, the certainty, of personal salvation’ (2007: 423), I want to argue that it is by examining the religious practice of watching that we can come to terms with what is going on in the local folk theology of eschatology. The obvious question, then, is what exactly are the Christians of Gamrie watching? What is it that they are looking for with such anticipation and expectation? The answer, it seems, is best provided by considering another brief ethnographic example.

One August Sunday morning, at the end of a breaking of bread service at the Braehead Hall, Billy stood to end the meeting in prayer:

We think of the next great event that this world is going to experience, when you’re going to come into the air with all your archangels and your power and the glorious coming of yourself. Lord, we are waiting for you! As we scan the skies day by day, we can say “Is it today?” Lord, your coming is near!

Everything's pointing to it Lord, and we are waiting upon it. This may be the last occasion [we meet to break bread], we do not know.

After Billy prayed, some of the ladies stood up and prepared the usual tea and cake that we always had during the brief interval between the breaking of bread and the Bible reading service. As we sipped our cups of tea an interesting conversation about war time rationing arose, leading me to ask why even during this period there was so much wastage of fish when people in urban areas were going hungry. Why did the government not step in and send the excess fish to the big cities? Without answering my question at all, John, another man present that day, started to speak about how tight government control over the fishing industry was today. He and several others present agreed that increasing regulation at the level of the European Union was a sure sign of the end times, indicating a definite move towards fulfilment of Biblical prophecy about the establishment of a one world government. The Euro was offered as another sure sign, this time with regards to the prophetic establishment of a one world currency. Helen agreed, mentioning that she had been watching a programme on Genesis TV, a popular Christian broadcaster, in which George Hargreaves (leader of the Scottish Christian Party) was being interviewed about how Christians in America view British society; 'abortion, gays, drunkenness, Islam...', came the list, with a sense of alarm, '...and it's all true! It's all true!' she said, shaking her head with a grave expression.

What is it that the Christians of Gamrie are watching for with such anticipation and expectation? They are watching – literally 'scanning the skies' in Billy's terms – for the second coming of Christ. More than this, they are looking for the signs that indicate the imminence of such a return – 'everything's pointing to it Lord, and we are waiting upon it' Billy prayed. Enchantment, then, occurs through looking for and identifying these 'signs of the times'. And what are these signs? Helen was very clear; 'abortion, gays, drunkenness, Islam...' – these were the things that constituted the eagerly anticipated 'soon return' as an enchanted certainty. To Gamrie's Christians, it was indeed 'the next great event that this world is going to experience'. The question was not 'if' but 'when', of that they were convinced. Yet the question as to *exactly when* produced less certainty. 'This may be the last occasion [we meet to break bread], we do not know' Billy ended. It is to this 'not knowing' that I now want to turn to, specifically with regards to the role

that watching for ‘signs of the times’ had in eschatologically shaping the temporal category of the near future. I start, as before, with an ethnographic encounter.

Signs of the times: the imminence of the near future?

Driving along the road to Macduff one morning in late February, Jim, one of my key informants, started to tell George and I about the unfolding of certain spiritual ‘signs’ that indicated to him that we were living in ‘the last of the last days’. When I asked what kinds of signs he was referring to, what he said next I still find difficult to fully comprehend. He told us how the Devil was preparing the unsaved population of the world to be tricked into worshipping the soon to appear anti-Christ, and in so doing, to condemn themselves to an eternity in hell. The early stages of this trickery were clearly visible, he told us, in certain aspects of popular culture. The television show *Star Trek* was an important example. The handheld ‘tricorders’ (fig. 46) used by the crew of the *Starship Enterprise* as ‘scanning’ devices had, he argued, seen their Satanic real-world fulfilment in the advent of flip-phone mobiles (fig. 47).



Fig. 46: Star Trek ‘Tricorder’ (Slippery Brick 2011)



Fig. 47: Flip-phone mobile (The Register 2011)

Such technology – once a thing of science fiction – was now reality, Jim told us. This was sinister, he alleged, because when the ‘signs and wonders’ of the fast approaching apocalypse took place, far from falling on their faces in terror and calling upon God for salvation, people would explain away such genuinely miraculous occurrences as simply yet another leap in technology. The same evil intent, he told us, was behind the *Star Trek* ‘transporters’ (fig. 48); the concept of being able to ‘beam someone up’ from one place

and transport them millions of miles away in an instant was clearly a demonic counterfeit of the soon to occur 'rapture' (fig. 49), when all the world's born-again Christians (living and dead) would disappear 'into the air' at the point of Christ's Second Coming to earth.

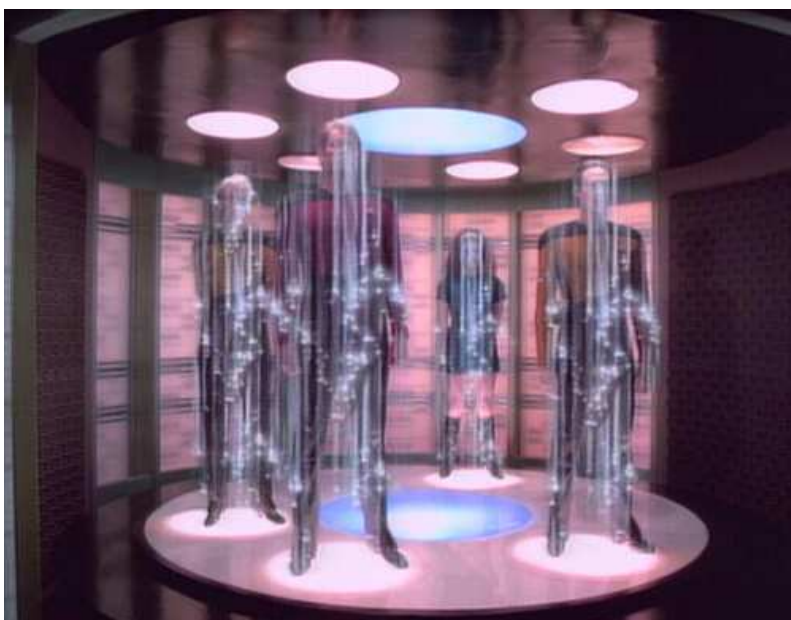


Fig. 48: Star Trek 'Transporter'
(Tutor Site 2011)



Fig. 49: The 'Rapture' (Notter 2011)

Applying similar logic, the Harry Potter books were also said to be a demonic plot, with children becoming desensitised to the evil realities of witchcraft and thereby being prepared to welcome (and later worship) the anti-Christ and his Satanic magic during the 'end times'. The conversation grew stranger still when Jim went on to describe how he also believed in alien abductions. He explained to us how accounts of alien abduction

were remarkably similar to each other, with many involving descriptions of various sorts of (usually anal) ‘probing’. This latter detail, consistently provided by those who claim to have been abducted by aliens was crucial, Jim said, because it suggested that the Devil himself was responsible for these extra terrestrial activities. This was so, he elaborated, insofar as it provided clear evidence of demonic attempts to genetically resurrect the Nephelim⁵⁵ (via alien probing) in order to build up Satan’s kingdom on earth.

Jim further explained that the current global economic recession would slowly move humanity towards accepting a one-world government and single world currency which would be instated by the (as yet unrevealed) anti-Christ, who would rise to god-like status having solved the credit crisis, only to then financially enslave the human race under a rule of demonic tyranny. As for the actual identity of the anti-Christ, Jim was uncharacteristically coy. He explained that where the Old Testament had different Christ-like figures (such as Noah and Joseph) that prophetically pointed towards the eventual arrival of the Saviour, in our day we could see different world leaders who closely resembled the anti-Christ to come, such as Mikhail Gorbachev and Tony Blair. Such world leaders had a dual spiritual purpose as far as Jim was concerned – they existed to warn and thus *sensitise* Christians, and precondition and thus *desensitise* ‘unbelievers’ to the spiritual dangers to come. Having sat in the car listening, I arrived in Macduff with my head spinning. I turned over in my mind what Jim had been saying as we walked to a Kirk coffee morning, but, before long, we were sitting at a table, eating home baking, drinking tea and chatting about plans for the rest of the weekend.

The answer that was given to me on dozens of occasions in response to questions about how my informants knew with such certainty that we were living in the ‘last of the last days’ was, predictably enough, a quotation from the Bible:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers

⁵⁵ A race of giants that emerged, according to the Jewish-Christian tradition, when fallen angels mated with women (see Genesis 6.1-4 and Numbers 13.32-33).

shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. (Second Timothy 3.1-5, 12-13).

Not only was this a well remembered and much discussed few verses of scripture, but it was also the ‘key text’ of many a sermon. A frequently offered refrain in such sermons was ‘we’re not living in *first* Timothy days; we’re living in *second* Timothy days!’ Judging by the solemn agreement of much of the congregation whose nodding was only matched by their grave expressions, I came to realise this temporal placement of the ‘era’ of Second Timothy alongside the present day was a deeply significant one for my informants. What was going on here, on one level at least, was really rather straightforward: biblical time had been conflated with the present via these prophetic texts. But how? The answer to this, again, while easy enough to state in fairly simple folk-theological terms, appears to indicate a much more complex social reality revolving around it.

The real question, then, to return to Crapanzano, is ‘how does this picture ... colour their everyday experiences of time?’ (2007: 423). How did the belief that the Christians of Gamrie were living in the ‘perilous times’ of the ‘last days’ become experientially real to them? And what effect did this have on the ways in which they related to the past, present, and, ‘near’ and ‘distant’ future? How did they materially affirm that they were indeed living to see the prophetic fulfilment of the verses of scripture quoted above? They do so by looking, as already described, to Star Trek and mobile phones, to Harry Potter merchandise and emptying Sunday schools, to Mikhail Gorbachev and Tony Blair and to all those other things that my friends deemed indicative of the peril that was soon to befall them: the recession, swine flu, the MPs expense scandal, unusually heavy snow falls, homosexual ministers, the perceived spread of militant Islam, abortion, earthquakes and public drunkenness, to name but a few. The remainder of the chapter, then, describes and explains how these signs of the times secured the experience, not of immanence, but of imminence, making God and the Devil ‘soon’. Because of the multifarious nature of these ‘signs of the times’, in an attempt to give as nuanced an analysis as possible, I am going to focus on just one ‘type’ of sign – the political – and, more specifically still, on only two formulations of it, that of Israel and the European Union.

The indexicality of eschatology

One of the last things [Rev] Jim Philip said to us before leaving Gamrie to become a minister in Edinburgh was: “Watch Israel! She’s God’s signpost in the world!” I always remembered that and took an interest in Israel ever since.

(Mary, elderly Christian, Gamrie).

What does it mean for a geo-political entity like Israel to be a signpost – *God’s* signpost no less – and one that is to direct and guide the entire world? The answer, it seems, is not only temporal and eschatological, but also eminently material.

I was introduced to local people’s fascination with Israel just a few days after moving to Gamrie during my first meeting with Donald, the Kirk minister. Donald spoke to me about his ‘passion for the Jewish people’ and described his most recent trip to Israel, showing me some items he had purchased on past visits – a replica crown of thorns and a Star of David key fob. As we talked, I found myself wondering why, being a Christian minister, Donald did not feel inclined to support the cause of Palestinian Christians over that of Israeli Jews. When I summoned the courage to ask he looked mildly affronted and replied that most Palestinians who claimed to be Christians were not ‘committed’, ‘born-again’ evangelicals but saw their faith primarily as a marker of political affiliation. This turned the conversation to the conflict in the Middle East, with Donald specifically mentioning the ‘Six-Day War’⁵⁶ where, he said, Israel experienced God’s divine deliverance as when Moses led the Ancient Israelites to safety through the miraculous parting of the Red Sea. He went on to decry what he called the ‘anti-Israel stance in the British media’ which he said was tantamount to ‘propaganda’, and predicted all out war in the Middle East, especially in view of the fact that Israel would attack Iran if it persisted in its nuclear arms programme.

Two days later I had another chance to make some sense of all that Donald had been saying, and why this conversational foray into the realm of politics was coming from a man who represented a Protestant tradition very resistant to ‘worldly’ politics. As we chatted again, Donald told me that he believed the Bible made it clear that Christians could expect to receive spiritual blessing from God only if they loved and prayed for

⁵⁶ The June 1967 war where Israel defeated Egypt, Jordan and Syria.

Israel. On still other occasions, Donald spoke about how the land Israel currently inhabited was theirs by divine right, and as such, the world could be certain that the Jews would reclaim the entirety of the Promised Land before Christ's Second Coming: 'The people of God will be back in the Land. God has a plan. I think the next big thing is Iran. I think Israel is like the Christian – always under persecution. The Bible tells us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. True Christian believers stand up for the fundamentals of Scripture and stand up for Israel'.

While I could grasp most of what Donald was trying to say to me on a theological level, it was only after many months, when attending a Christian Zionist conference with Donald, that I began to understand what 'stand[ing] up for Israel' meant to local Christians, particularly with regards to the ways in which they experienced politics. The conference, in Perth, was led by a group calling itself 'Yachad⁵⁷ Scotland'. In amongst discussions about the fear of infiltration, how evangelical beliefs were being criminalised, the need for a mobile Christian Zionist library, how 9/11 was a watershed moment for the fortunes of Israel and prophetic warnings about 'the coming storm' of Islam, it was something one particular woman said to the assembled group of ageing but enthusiastic Christian Zionists that struck me as particularly insightful to the nature of their cause when she stood to proclaim: 'We've all got a burden for Israel – it's so that Jesus comes back!'. The reason her words seemed so informative, was, I think, because of the way they expressed what seemed to be at the heart of so many discussions about Israel that I had had with my Christian friends in Gamrie. What she was saying so clearly was that Christian support and concern for Israel was, in essence, an eschatological concern.

Christians were to offer prayers for Israel, Donald told me, if they wanted to experience God's blessing. Yet, what I did not fully appreciate at the time was that while some of these blessings could legitimately be thought to occur in the present, their dominant focus was always being transposed onto the future – to the return of Christ at the point of the Second Coming. This was the case because the majority of my Christian informants believed that the Second Coming would not occur until all the Jewish peoples of the world had been gathered into the borders of Israel and then converted, *en masse*, to Christianity. 'We've all got a burden for Israel – it's so that Jesus comes back!' the woman proclaimed to a room full of people nodding in agreement.

⁵⁷ Meaning 'together' in Hebrew.

Thus, evangelical support for the Jews was (in a strange turn of phrase I heard while listening to a sermon recording with Mary) about ‘provoking Israel to jealousy’. The ethno-theological logic was as follows: Christians, in praying for Jews, would receive a blessedly close relationship with God – a relationship that Jews would observe, covet, and seek after, only to discover that the true object of this blessing was Jesus. This discovery would lead to their conversion and salvation and thus usher in the end of the world. The results were experienced by my Christian friends as a win-win situation – temporal blessing on earth in the near future eventually giving way to eternal blessing in heaven, all brought about by the prayers of ‘true Christian believers [who] stand up for Israel’.

The materiality of eschatology

Where the ‘politics of eschatology’, as I have called it, clearly overlapped with ‘the transcendental realm of mystic life’ (Weber 1978a: 155) not only in prayer, but also through missionisation⁵⁸, other aspects of my informants’ Christian Zionism were more nakedly political. During the Yachad conference in Perth, for example, there was an open time of discussion and prayer where very strong support for Benjamin Netanyahu and the *Likud* Party was voiced. People prayed that Netanyahu would continue in power, not being forced to enter into coalition with opposition parties who might push for the halting of settlement construction. Fears that the 2009 water crisis in Israel might play into the hands of more liberal political opponents willing to negotiate with neighbouring Islamic states on key political issues was also subject to much discussion and prayer. Such topics, far from being seen as the exclusive remit of secular politics and thus ‘off limits’ at religious gatherings, were actually deemed to be central to the aims and purposes of the conference. Support for Israel as a geo-political entity was seen as inseparable from the wider concerns that local Christians had about faithful adherence to the scripture in general and Biblical ‘end times’ prophecy in particular. And, as we shall see below, it was by identifying with Jewish people and their politics that local evangelicals such as Donald and Mary sought to define themselves as ‘true Christians’.

⁵⁸ Many of the churches in Gamrie funded missionaries and took pilgrimages to the ‘Holy Land’.

I want to return to my earlier question – what does it mean for a geo-political entity like Israel to be a signpost? – by suggesting that Israel became a temporal marker in the near future of the eschatological calendar. In this sense, what mattered for my informants were ‘real’ political events: Likud’s electoral fortunes; the handling of the water crisis; negotiations with neighbouring States; these political issues were *God’s* politics as far as my informants were concerned because they addressed the future fortunes of *God’s* chosen people. Crucially, such issues concerned Israel (and by extension Gamrie’s Christian Zionists) not just in the present or the distant future (Guyer 2007), but also in the near future, that is, in the next year or five or ten years. The drought of 2009 did not simply represent the problems of the past, but, as demand for water rose, the problem was transposed onto the spiritual and civic happenings of the near future. Equally, elections being fought today concerned the political complexion of, for a minimum, the next four years. So too with Israeli settlements – conflicts surrounding UN resolutions to halt their construction will be played out not only in the newspapers of today and the next day, but also in the months and years to come, especially in view of *Likud’s* policy of permitting the ‘natural growth’ of these neighbourhoods. The near future, it seems, is not only unavoidable as Guyer (2007) points out, but actively engaged with as a vital platform on which the drama of the eschatological calendar is soon to culminate.

Where Israel being a signpost means inhabiting the political eschatology of the near future, it is important to note that this indwelling was by no means purely ideational, that is, it was not purely an example of the overlap between folk theology and political ideology. In this sense I am not simply referring to what Weber might well have readily identified as ‘the transcendental realm of mystic life’, nor am I even limiting myself to ‘direct and personal human relations’ (Weber 1978a: 155), but rather I seek to be inclusive of inanimate objects that nonetheless exert a kind of agency upon the world through their material properties. This is abundantly visible when we return our attention to those objects that make up the physicality of the signpost, which, just like all signs, are able to ‘point the way’ not because they communicate ethereal impressions but because they are themselves material indexes (Keane 2006, 2008).

I have already indirectly discussed the material nature of Israel’s indexicality through my analysis of land and water, that is, through settlement construction and problems with

drought. It is, of course, well known that ‘The Land Issue’ is central not only to the identity of many in Israel (Braverman 2009, Kelly 2009) but also to Christian Zionists (Spector 2008). During the Yachad conference I remember one particular woman who prayed with a heavy, almost angry tone that ‘Netanyahu would not have to give away *one inch* of land! *Not one inch!*’ her zeal firmly based upon an insistence that the land Israel currently occupied was theirs by divine right. Indeed, theirs was the ‘*Promised Land*’ as another delegate insisted to me, ‘and God *doesn’t* break His promises’. So too with the water issue – where Israeli settlement expansion was seen as a prophetic fulfilment of the Jewish peoples returning to reclaim the entirety of the Biblical promised land (a process Gamrics said would be completed sometime in the near future), material provision of adequate supplies of water was seen as eschatologically essential. To return to my use of Keane in the previous chapter:

Religions may not always demand beliefs... [but] will always invoke material forms. It is in this materiality that they are part of experience... provoke responses... have public lives and enter into ongoing chains of causes and consequences (Keane 2008: 124).

What I find intriguing about Keane’s statement here is not simply the assertion of the primacy of materiality within the realm of belief, but also the way that materiality is said to ‘provoke responses’. Asking what some of these possible responses might look like seems to be a key question here, especially given our interest in the temporal materiality of eschatology. I only have space to discuss one particular response here, but it is one that I feel sufficiently illustrates my broader theoretical point about the relationship between objects and the near future to limit the need for further supplementary evidence.

In another conversation with George and Jim, George said that he was amazed to learn that much of present day Israel was built on what had previously been swamp land. Jim agreed further adding that Israel was also partially built on desert ground, which, he told us, was a prophetic fulfilment of the Biblical prophecy that ‘the desert would blossom’⁵⁹, made a reality, he said, by various tree planting programmes set up by different Christian organisations, such as God TV. I was vaguely familiar with this particular scheme, as other friends in the village had mentioned their support for the ‘Million Trees’ campaign at God TV, but had never really explained to me what it was about or why they were

⁵⁹ Isaiah 35 and 41.

taking part. Later that day, with my interest somewhat renewed, I went online to god.tv/israeltrees to get some more information. What I discovered was an entirely different imagining of the ‘born-again’ Christian’s temporal relationship to eschatology to that which I had previously assumed. This is what the website had to say on the matter:

JOIN US TO MAKE PROPHETIC HISTORY... in this apostolic prophetic act as we prepare the Holy Land for the return of the King... GOD TV is planting over ONE MILLION TREES across the Holy Land as a miraculous sign to Israel and to the world that Jesus is coming soon. This is a unique opportunity to make your mark on the land of Israel.

We’re not going to stop doing this until, I believe, the Lord comes back... [A]s you read Isaiah 41, you find out about how passionate God is about turning deserts into a blooming garden... He Himself says He will do it. Of course, how will he do it? *He will do it through you and I!*

The Lord challenged us to prepare the land for the return of... the Messiah. And I tell you I feel like we are in the last days, in fact, *I know we’re in the last days!* No man knows the hour. No man knows the day. But *we do know the season and this here is the last days*. And the Lord said, “Prepare the land Rory, Wendy – challenge my people across the earth”. And that’s what we’ve done... This little [tree] because of your generosity has been put in the soil of the Holy Land! So dear partner, this is an extraordinary hour we are living in! We are fulfilling, *literally*, the Word of the Lord through Isaiah chapter 41 and we are doing it as his *body*! His *hands* and his *feet* and his *body*; we are literally fulfilling the Word of the Lord! This is *so* exciting! The instruction from our heavenly father, Abba, said “A million trees!” [...] So for us as a Christian family around the world to put in a million trees in this land is a profound prophetic statement and I believe will touch this land, will touch the heart of the people, of the nation (God TV 2011).

Where religion, because of its inherent materiality, ‘provokes responses’ (Keane 2008: 124), the response of some of the Christians in Gamrie to the eschatological statement ‘*I know we’re in the last days!*’ was not simply a material one, but a material one that was played out in the near future. Indeed, the planning and execution of a £15 million tree

planting project seems to fit with each element of Guyer's typification of the near future as:

...the reach of thought and imagination, of planning and hoping, of tracing out mutual influence, of engaging in struggles for specific goals, in short, of the process of implicating oneself in the ongoing life of the social and material world (Guyer 2007: 409).

That God TV's 'Million Trees' campaign is an act which engages in a struggle for a specific goal and thereby implicates one's self in the social and material world seems clear. The struggle is eschatological – to 'prepare the Holy Land for the return of the Messiah'. Further, it is implicated in the social and material insofar as it sets up a (simultaneously real and imagined) social relationship between Israeli Jews and Christian Zionists via the materiality of trees. That this should be occurring in the way that it is is not surprising, for, as Braverman (2009) points out in her book *Planted Flags*, the cultural and political salience of trees in this part of the Middle East is deeply embedded. Yet, where Braverman examines the ways in which the 'ostensibly apolitical' planting of pine trees and olive groves (by Israelis and Palestinians respectively) fuels 'a brutal yet clandestine war... over the natural landscape' (2009: 3), my concern is not with the politics of military conflict, but with the ways in which material things (such as pine trees) are able to instantiate a specific kind of relationship between eschatology and human agency.

To help clarify this relationship I want first to highlight the fact that Rory Alec – cofounder of God TV with his wife, Wendy Alec – appears to be asking a similar (if differently worded) question to the one I am asking here, namely how will these eschatological 'signs of the times' come to pass in the near future? We have already both provided our own response: where Rory proclaims 'a million trees!' as his answer, I have answered in a not totally dissimilar way by discussing the central importance of the way in which materiality 'provoke[s] responses' (Keane 2008: 124). But we might again want to ask, *how*? How do objects provoke responses? And to what end? Rory's answer again sounds familiar: '*He will do it through you and I!*', that is, through those who give \$25 or £15 or €20 to plant a tree in the Negev desert. Remember, after all, how Rory's

supporters are told that they are ‘...fulfilling, *literally*, the Word of the Lord through Isaiah chapter 41... [W]e are doing it as his *body*! His *hands* and his *feet*’. My answer, although certainly not an apologetic for Rory’s afforesting missionary zeal, takes much the same tack insofar as I too turn to human agency as providing the solution.

What we see, then, in my friends’ support for the ‘Million Trees’ campaign is what I want to call eschatological agency. By this I simply mean to refer to the way in which Christians (in this case the Christians of Gamrie) can and do appropriate the eschatological narrative contained within the prophetic texts of the Bible by directly inserting themselves into the actual unfolding of ‘end times’ events. This is crucial insofar as it turns a (strictly theological and therefore ideational) conversation about Biblical texts and Biblical events into a conversation about texts and events that take as their stage ‘the ongoing life of the social and material world’ (Guyer 2007: 409). Further, where these texts and events occur not only in the present but also in the near future, we can see that the objects that we have been speaking about (trees for planting, land for construction, water for drinking) granted my informants some ownership (or perhaps authorship) over the unfolding of the eschaton. *They* were the ones who were ushering in the Second Coming, not only through their prayers, but also through their political support for Israel, and, as we now see, through their ‘literal’ (that is, *material*) fulfilment of the prophetic scriptures: ‘We are fulfilling, *literally*, the Word of the Lord through Isaiah chapter 41...’. As was the case in the previous chapter, the materiality of the body is central: ‘we are doing it as his *body*! His *hands* and his *feet*’. Eschatology is fulfilled, then, not through the unknowable, inscrutable will of God, but through the words and objects that humans and their bodies bring to bear upon the world – through prayers that Benjamin Netanyahu would not have to form a coalition government with opposition parties and through the planting of trees in the Negev desert.

To summarise: being a signpost means being a temporal marker in the near future of the eschatological calendar. These ‘signs of the end times’ bring their indexicality (Keane 2002) to bear upon the world in and through their materiality – through settlement construction, water provision and the planting of trees. This last example, ‘the afforesting of the Promised Land’ (Braverman 2009: 3) also shows us how the Christians of Gamrie themselves became agents of eschatological change as they engaged in an ‘apostolic

[and] prophetic act [to]... prepare the Holy Land for the return of the... Messiah'. Signs, as indexes (Keane 2002), function successfully (that is, they point convincingly) not only by virtue of the immutability of their non-human material properties (think here of security walls and tree trunks), but also because of their ability to draw human agents into their orbit, allowing for the possibility that the sign itself may be changed, reworked and given, if not an entirely new meaning, then undoubtedly an altered temporality.

While this altered temporality obviously concerns bringing the Biblical narrative of the ancient Israelites into the daily lived experience of 21st century Gamrics (i.e. the past brought into the present), it also concerns the compressing of the eschatological timetable from two polar extremes – the utterly imminent and eternally distant – into a newly populated near future (i.e. today and eternity brought into the 'soon to occur'). But again, if my discussion here is to remain grounded in the material, a question I asked previously needs to be asked here too, that is, how? How was it, then, that God – and the Devil – were brought into the realm of the soon to occur?

To the extent that any answer needs to be able to make sense of the ways in which these 'signs of the times' manage to point convincingly, what is needed is an examination of what these signs point to. I have, I hope, already answered this: the signs of the end times that my informants sought out were those that pointed to politics – particularly to political happenings in Israel, and, as we shall see below, within the European Union. While I will be more able to fully spell out a convincing answer towards the end of the chapter, all I want to say here is that politics provided particularly 'convincing' indexes because the political realm is fluid and constantly changing. Politics, then, offered near endless chances for end times prophecy to be fulfilled 'in our day and generation' as my informants used to tell me, that is, it was eschatologically convincing exactly because of its malleability. But it was not only God who was experienced as being temporally imminent and who was said to materially inhabit the near future – the Devil too was regarded as a key player in the unfolding of the politics of the eschaton. It is to this that I now turn.

Is Brussels the Anti-Christ?

It was the day of the annual Kirk Sunday school picnic. At one point, in between sack races and rounds of tea and hot meat pies, a woman in her late sixties who I did not immediately recognise as the mother of a Kirk member visiting from Northern Ireland sat down beside me and – seemingly out of the blue – struck up a brief but arresting conversation about the anti-Christ. Without any introductory small talk she turned to me and said ‘homosexuality is now protected by law you know. Yes, it’s this European Union thing. It’s a sign of the end times. I sometimes wonder if Brussels is the anti-Christ’. And with that said, she turned to greet her grandchildren who were clamouring to show her the prizes they had won during the morning competitions.

What struck me as particularly insightful here was not the way in which a person might initiate what seemed to be a very casual conversation about the end of the world with a relative stranger (although I do think this is interesting and relevant) but rather, in this specific instance, the matter of fact identification of ‘Brussels’⁶⁰ as the anti-Christ, that is, (in local folk-theological terms), a counterfeit saviour controlled by the Devil to inspire blasphemous and thus soul ruining devotion. The woman’s comments also touched on another key area of eschatological sign searching – the politics of sexual morality. Stories were constantly circulating in the village about legislation ‘from Europe’ that meant, among other things, that ‘homosexuality had to be taught in primary schools these days’, and that ‘ministers would soon be forced to marry gay couples’. Licensing laws were another key sign: ‘The Scottish Government couldn’t even shut the pubs if they wanted to because the EU keeps them open!’ one retired fisherman told me, shaking his head in disbelief.

Thus, where the previous section of this chapter concerned spiritual imminence through the political eschatology of Israel, we now turn to consider spiritual imminence through the political eschatology of the European Union. This section, as well as being about politics also concerns economics. In this regard, I want to concentrate on two specific ‘signs of the times’, namely the recession and fisheries regulation. In taking each in turn I want to argue, in connection to what has gone before, that eschatology, by establishing

⁶⁰ Meaning the EU.

signs of the times, inhabits the near future and secures an imminent experience of the supernatural. The main difference, then, concerns supposed authorship: where I previously attended to the imminence of God, I now turn to the imminence of the Devil and his anti-Christ.

During my fieldwork one of the key ‘signs of the times’ that my Christian informants identified as indicative of the soon-to-occur apocalypse was the current global economic recession. Intriguingly, the ‘sign’ that the recession represented was not so much the direct problems associated with the present financial climate, but rather imaginings about what possible future solutions to the economic crisis might entail. To explain this further it will be helpful to recount two ethnographic encounters. The first description comes from a series of conversations with Sandy, a CB friend of mine from Gamrie; the second is taken from two sermons given by Herman, a visiting Christian Zionist preacher from South Africa who worked as a missionary in Israel.

This new EU President fulfils the [Biblical] prophecy about a one world government. Israel will be led by a false prophet to make a pact with the EU [...]. 2nd Thessalonians tells us that after three and a half years the [EU] President will break the pact and the Lord will return in judgement. That’s why we dinna vote; politics is nae for Christians Joe; democracy is nae God’s way [...]. [In the Old Testament] Israel is in the yoke of Rome, but nowadays it’s the same: if you are working, you feel the political yoke of Rome [i.e. the imagined evil alliance between the Roman Catholic Church and the EU]. The world is looking for a man [i.e. a human saviour]. This Beast... the anti-Christ, is going to come out of the EU and will crush all religion, *especially* those who lobby government to get their own way. [...] This man is going to rise up out of the EU. He will be a financial wizard and he’s going to solve all this economic crisis, the recession, just like that [in an instant] and the world is going to totally go after him [i.e. worship him]. And then he will reveal himself to be the Man of Sin [the anti-Christ]. They [the unsaved] don’t realise that their time is almost up; the thing about the EU is it’s a leopard – it moves fast!

* * *

We are living in the end times! Where do we stand at the end of time? The shaking of the American economy is the beginning of that big shaking. The nations are in perplexity. It's not going to be fixed. This is just the beginning! I believe we are standing at the door of the failure of western society! [...] In the end times God says we will call good evil and evil good – abortion is not sin, it is reproductive health; an alcoholic is not a sinner, but sick... I believe the time of testing is going to come and it's not going to be easy! This world is in the most polluted state it's ever been in because of greed! We're never going to have enough! [...] We must be alert... There will be no peace in this world until Jesus comes back. [...] Credit is an evil trap from Satan! America is addicted to debt! By using credit cards you are aligning yourself to the anti-Christ! Do not serve the world! Do not run the rat race! This world is in a mess but when the time comes we will be able to stand. [...] The UN will unite against Jerusalem and Jesus will defeat them!

I have argued that eschatology establishes the near future by identifying what local people constantly referred to as 'signs of the end times'. Here, then, we see that a key sign of the end times is the global economic recession, identified above by both of my informants as a key index of future change. A central feature here concerns the issue of financial debt – a theme that is explicit in Herman's sermons and implicit in much of what Sandy and I spoke about with regards the end times. 'America is addicted to debt! By using credit cards you are aligning yourself to the anti-Christ! Do not serve the world!' was the rallying call from the pulpit that Sunday night at the Kirk. 'The anti-Christ... will be a financial wizard and he's going to solve all this economic crisis' Sandy told me, going on to predict how the grim events of the Tribulation would see the vast majority of the population of the planet enslaved to this 'Beast' who would rule via his control over world debt. Crucially for my argument here, what is important about debt is the temporal relationship it establishes with the eschaton. Essentially, debt is fundamentally concerned with the near future, that is, it is inextricably linked to 'the process of implicating oneself in the ongoing life of the social and material world' (Guyer 2007: 409). This matters for the eschatological projects of people like Herman and Sandy because being implicated with the world financially means being implicated with the politics of the Devil. Credit cards, after all, align oneself to the anti-Christ.

While I want to leave my discussion of the eschatological significance of fishing to later in the chapter, it is interesting here to note the double bind in which this view of debt places local fishermen who are reliant upon credit to maintain their businesses. With the cost of trawlers ranging from £2 million to £25 million, no one in this family run industry can purchase a vessel without taking out an enormous mortgage. Does this mean, then, that the material and ideational experiences of being a Christian and a fisherman are somehow incompatible? I want to suggest they are not by returning to an earlier comment of mine where I emphasised not ‘present predicaments’ but ‘imagined future solutions’. Thus, debt *per se* was not seen as demonic or even particularly significant. What gave it eschatological significance was not even the fact that (personal) debt and (global) recession caused financial pressures and problems. Rather, debt and recession were eschatologically significant for my informants because of the nature of the solutions that these financial problems would seemingly demand.

But what were these solutions? They were, according to Herman and Sandy, demonic ones: ‘The Beast... will be a financial wizard and he’s going to solve all this economic crisis, the recession, just like that [in an instant] and the world is going to totally go after him’, Sandy explained. Herman agreed, describing how credit cards were an evil trap from Satan because they were tantamount to slavery; a kind of economic bondage, which, by wreaking havoc in people’s lives, would cause them to reach out for financial deliverance from any quarter. Their monetary saviour, emerging from the EU, would come as a ‘wizard’, sweeping their (and the world’s) fiscal problems away – ‘just like that’ – as if by magic. Economic salvation, would, according to this view, lead to idolatrous spiritual devotion, and, at the point where this wizard reveals himself to be the anti-Christ, the situation would be irretrievable – all those who had bowed the knee to the ‘Beast’ would be cast into hell forever.

By holding that the recession was an eschatologically significant index by virtue of the fact that it pointed forward, into the near future, to the soon arrival of him who was known variously as the ‘Man of Sin’, the ‘Beast’ and the ‘anti-Christ’, the political eschatology of economics – as revealed by the current financial crisis – was, for Herman, Sandy and many others in Gamrie, a crucial sign of the soon to occur apocalypse. We see here how politics and economics, far from being ‘secular’ concerns, acted as prophetic

barometers, which, just like all forecasting devices, had as their primary temporal object, not present happenings or eternal states, but that which falls in between – the near future. The near future was invoked in and through the medium term consequences of the unfolding of the eschaton. While the crisis was being experienced presently (and also had eternal consequences), what really mattered was the watching and waiting that had to be done during this ‘in between’ period. Remember, after all, how the temporal focus of Billy’s prayer during a breaking of bread service was not focused upon the past death of Christ, but upon his future return: ‘As we scan the skies day by day, we can say “Is it today?” *Lord, your coming is near!* Everything’s pointing to it Lord, and *we are waiting upon it*’.

Yet crucially for my argument here, this temporal nearness is indexed, not by the imminence of God, but of the Devil and the anti-Christ. We can see how this is the case by returning to Keane’s assertion that the materiality of religion ‘enter[s] into ongoing chains of causes and consequences’ (2008: 124). I have argued that the Christians of Gamrie experienced the causes and consequences of the eschatology of the Devil in and through politics and economics. The recession would lead to the stellar rise of the anti-Christ, who, in receiving the worship of the world, would condemn it to a ‘lost eternity’. The consequences of his ‘wizard-like’ fiscal solutions – to appear in the near future – would instantiate a demonic one-world government held together by a totally unified economy and single world currency. The ultimate material consequence would be all out war against Israel and the eventual (bodily) return of Christ to rescue his chosen people.

In this sense, causes cannot be neatly separated from each other; as with the ‘Million Trees’ project, both human and supernatural agency are said to be at work. The consequences, likewise, cast the Christians of Gamrie not in a role of passive observation; ‘scanning the skies’ in Billy’s terms, is not an inert task, but rather one that actively shapes the unfolding of ‘end times’ events. Further, as I have already argued, it is precisely because of the constantly fluctuating make-up of political and economic events that these spheres of human life functioned so well as eschatological indexes, compressing the temporal experience of local Christians, with imminence and the near future co-constituting each other without losing any of what made them distinct. Thus, the Second Coming was experienced as utterly imminent, in an apparent paradox, exactly

because of the ways in which these ‘signs’ were said to prophetically apply to the medium term of the near future. Indeed, the imminence of eschatological agency occurred in the present while also being pushed forwards into the political and economic happenings of the years to come. Debt repayments, political conflict in the Middle East, the establishment of an EU president, and, as we shall see below, international management of fisheries were all said to be occurring in the present, culminating in the near future, and eventually achieving their (eternal) fulfilment at the end of time. It is to fisheries management and its imminent material impact upon the eschatology of the Devil to which I now wish to turn.

Food Sovereignty and the Mark of the Beast

My first visit to the Fraserburgh Fish Market (fig. 50) was exhilarating. The mounting smell of fish as boxes were dragged across the concrete floor by deckhands gripping long metal hooks; the quick, intense movements of merchants as they dove their hands into mounds of ice to pull up and inspect random specimens; the shout of an auctioneer signalling the start of a sale (fig. 51); the gathering groups of men jostling for position around a row of boxes; the furious pace of auctions in a language even more indecipherable than the local Doric; the occasional sudden silence as a coin was discreetly tossed (ostensibly out of sight of the auctioneer) to determine who won a box if two bidders had the same maximum price in mind; the scribbling of final prices into notebooks; the scattering of paper tickets bearing the merchant’s name to mark a sale (fig. 52). Yet, as exciting as that first trip to photograph the market was, I left feeling discouraged by the fact that because my research was about ‘religion’, I would not be able to find a link, no matter how tenuous, to justify the inclusion of this material into the final thesis. As it turned out, I had no need to worry.



Fig. 50: Activity at Fraserburgh Fish Market.



Fig. 51: Auction at Fraserburgh Fish Market.



Fig. 52: Marking a sale, Fraserburgh Fish Market.

My discouragement stemmed from an assumption that the fish market was an altogether too 'secular' place to be written into a thesis about Protestant fundamentalism. The fish market was noisy, smelly, colourful and full of life and youth, but, I told myself, had nothing to do with the quiet, reserved, and elderly world of the churches of Gamrie. Not only was I mistaken, but my error was revealed to me in the very place where I assumed the divide between the market and the church was strongest: at a Gamrie Brethren hall. It was a Monday night in February and I was attending a Bible Reading meeting with half a dozen other people at the Braehead Hall. The passage we were studying was all about the events leading up to the Second Coming. With the meeting lasting over two hours, we covered a wide range of eschatological topics. Yet it was the conversation that occurred during the last ten minutes of the meeting that was most memorable. Billy began to speak about how a prophecy in the Old Testament book of Daniel was being fulfilled in our own times as a result of the 'crushing... bear like hug' that the European Union was inflicting upon the Scottish Fishing Industry:

Billy: This day we're living in, we're living in the power of Rome, ken, the Roman Empire... and this small horn [in the prophecy of Daniel] had a *crushing* effect and we can see that in the day that we're living in. Our prospects as fishermen... we've seen in the EEC [now the EU]... We see the bear like hug, as the bear crushes its prey... We see this coming in *steady* in the fishing industry... because there's more rules and regulations and they're trying to *crush* the life outta the fishing industry, ken [...] We're in the end times and this is a process that we're going through and it's a crushing effect. We are seeing it continually, and it will go on and things will get *more* difficult and *more* difficult. And to fight against it – it's very near impossible now to be a Christian skipper of a boat and to tow the line that they're seeking you to tow. Making up your log books without falsifying them... it's very near impossible. The signs is all there.

George: And we can see the Mark of the Beast: *you're nay allowed to buy or sell fish without the Mark of the Beast.*

Betty: It's the same with the cattle. Unless your cattle is marked you canna sell it.

George: It's the Mark of the Beast at the end of days.

At various points throughout my fieldwork, Billy, Betty, George and others described to me how the EU was the 'new' Roman Empire, that is, the new dominant political power that – being imagined as a new world order that failed to submit to a totalising theology of Christian 'exceptionalism' (Cannell 2006) – also existed as the new evil empire. For Gamrics, fishing was a key 'sign of the times' that plainly displayed this fact. Fishing boats out at sea and fish markets on shore were spiritual battle grounds. As with providence and spiritual attack, God and the Devil were experienced as being at loggerheads, with the Christian (fisherman) in the middle. 'It's very near impossible now to be a Christian skipper of a boat' Billy complained. Importantly, this eschatological conflict was not purely about the seeming vagaries of global politics, but also about the lived material experience of the everyday lives of local fishermen. Detailed log sheets needed to be submitted about the precise amounts of which particular species had been caught (fig. 53). Every box of fish had to be labelled according to species, weight, which

boat caught it and where (fig. 54). Periodically, EU inspectors would arrive at the market and demand to see log books which would be scrutinised for errors. Markets would also be observed and minimum pricing enforced. If a box of fish failed to reach its minimum price set by the EU it would be marked as ‘withdrawn’ and sprayed with a red dye (fig. 55) to prevent illegal resale. I was told with disgust by friends at the auction that these fish would later be ground up to make cat food.



Fig. 53: Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency EU log sheets drop box, Fraserburgh Harbour.



Fig. 54: Labelled box of fish, Fraserburgh Fish Market.



Fig. 55: Withdrawing boxes of hake that have not made their minimum price set by the EU.

These EU rules also impacted life and work on the boats themselves. The well known ‘quota system’ (where boats had to purchase the rights to land certain quantities of certain species) caused significant problems of wastage. I can remember two occasions when trawling out at sea that we caught almost an entire haul of herring – a fish the boat did not have a licence for. The hopper was, as a result, full of huge quantities of fresh but drowned fish that had to be dumped back to sea. Further rules that stated that nets had to be of a certain size of mesh to avoid the unsustainable catching of overly young fish had little effect on this problem of ‘throwbacks’. During my time in Gamrie, another highly controversial EU restriction was introduced – the ‘days at sea’ scheme. This meant that as well as regulating catches by quota, fishermen could only be out at sea for a set number of days. This was problematic for those fishing a long distance from shore because it financially incentivised staying out to fish in bad weather over spending an allotted day unproductively returning to shelter in the harbour. For the two Sabbatarian skippers I went to sea with, short six day trips at sea (to ensure being onshore for Sunday worship) already meant significant time and fuel was lost steaming to and from fishing grounds. Where this inefficiency was being compounded by the new ‘days at sea’ legislation, my friends’ suspicions that the EU was anti-Christian were very much confirmed.

Interestingly, as Betty’s comment about cattle shows, there were concerns with the way that the EU functioned that went beyond the confines of Scottish fisheries. I remember one such occasion when having tea with some folks from Braehead. Helen said that she had been watching a programme on TV about how the vast majority of grain that was sold to Britain ‘came from the third world’. She then suggested that this increasing concentration of grain production into the hands of so few could be a demonic plot to enslave the human race during the end times via the imposition of famine. I am again struck here by the strong reappearance of materiality. Where I have shown that the eschatology of God concerned – among other things – settlement construction, pine trees and drinking water, what we see with the eschatology of the Devil is a no less material manifestation of what local people (very appropriately) referred to as ‘spiritual things’. Net mesh, log sheets, dumped hauls of herring, withdrawn boxes of hake sprayed with red dye, not to mention marked cattle and the production of grain; all of these existed as material markers of the imminence of the Devil. Crucially, just because these indexes

were solidly material, it would be wrong to conclude that they were also marked by an equally strong degree of ideational fixity. On the contrary, as I have already argued above, it is the fluidity of politics and the malleability of the signs that they produce that brings ‘spiritual things’ (in this case the Devil) into Gamrics lived temporal experience of the ‘soon’, that is, into their near future (Guyer 2007).

The EU is again insightful on this point. While many of the Brethren fishermen I knew from Gamrie told me that the quota system was demonic first and foremost because it represented the creeping ‘end times’ advance of the Kingdom of Satan, some of the Northern Irish members of the FPCU in the village had quite a different perspective on the issue. For many of them, the EU was not primarily running an evil shadow dictatorship of the fishing industry, but rather existed as the malevolent political wing of the Roman Catholic Church. I remember a particular conversation I had with two Northern Irish men in the FPCU, Noel and Sam, who told me (only half jokingly) that the Pope’s visit to Britain was probably to crown Tony Blair the new president of the EU. When I asked Noel if he thought the EU was the anti-Christ, he explained in a more serious tone that in the Bible, ‘the Beast’⁶¹ represented the earthly political order and ‘the Harlot’⁶² an evil demonic religion. So, Noel told me, ‘the harlot who rides the beast refers to the fact that the Roman Catholic Church controls the European Union’. ‘So you believe that the EU is controlled by the Catholic Church?!’ I asked, forgetting to hide my growing disbelief. ‘It *is*!’ Noel insisted ‘you can see that in the way that the EU pushes the social policy of Rome!’ ‘Do you think that the appointment of the EU president has something to do with the fact that Tony Blair converted to Catholicism?’ I responded. ‘It can’t hurt!’ Noel laughed knowingly, ‘it *certainly* can’t hurt!’

The examples I have discussed above show how for the Christians of Gamrie, the Devil was brought temporally close, that is, he was brought into the soon to occur ‘near future’, by the efforts of local Christians to establish ‘signs of the times’ that, in turn, rendered the forces of evil as materially imminent. The Devil was ‘soon’ because the fishing industry was being ‘crushed’ by the ‘bear like hug’ of the EU and could not survive for much

⁶¹ Revelation 13.

⁶² Revelation 17.

longer; the Devil was ‘soon’ because the anti-Christ was gaining control over world grain supplies and was planning an attack via the imposition of famine; the Devil was ‘soon’ because the Roman Pontiff was coming to Britain to crown Tony Blair president of the EU. Unlike Guyer’s (2007) view of American evangelicalism, for the Christians of Gamrie, these eschatological events – these prophetic *certainities* – were unfolding neither in the immediate present nor in the distant (‘eternal’) future, but in the space in-between that Guyer herself points to, that is, in the near future.

Conclusions: God and the Devil as Enchantment or ‘Re-enchantment’?

In ‘The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology’, Alfred Gell (1992) discusses the magical efficacy of Trobriand canoe-prows (fig. 56) whose brightly coloured swirling patterns ‘are supposed to dazzle the beholder and weaken his grip on himself’ (1992: 44) as he watches the canoe approaching his shores.



Fig. 56: Trobriand canoe-prow (Sea Going 2011)

The intent of the traveller may be to do battle or conduct trade. For Gell, the desired effect is the same – ‘psychological warfare’ (ibid.). But how do these boards work their magic? Gell’s answer, brilliant as it is as a stand-alone interpretation of a single human

encounter, also speaks to exactly what I want to claim about the enchanted efficacy of prophetic ‘signs of the end times’. For Gell:

The canoe-board does not interfere seriously... with the intended victim’s perceptual processes, but achieves its purpose in a much more roundabout way. [...] Its efficacy is to be attributed to the fact that these disturbances, mild in themselves, are interpreted as evidence of the magical power emanating from the board... [A]n impressive canoe-board is a physical token of magical prowess on the part of the owner of the canoe which is important... That is to say, the canoe-board is not dazzling as a physical object, but as a display of artistry explicable only in magical terms (Gell 1992: 46).

For Gell, this is true to the extent that:

The enchantment of technology is the power that technical processes have of casting a spell over us so that we see the real world in an enchanted form (Gell 1992: 44).

But how does technology (in Gell’s case art) cast a spell over us? I want to suggest that the enchantment of technology works its magic, in the language of semiotics, by conflating sign and referent. Thus, in speaking of technology (or art) what we are really talking about is how symbols work. The canoe-prow invokes fear and awe because its technical difficulty is such that it carries with it a ‘halo effect’, that is, it exists ‘as a display of artistry explicable only in magical terms’ (ibid.: 46). I see the canoe approaching my shores and I look upon the canoe-board and I say to myself ‘I could *never* make anything so amazing, nor could *anyone* for that matter because it’s not humanly possible’. Which, for Gell, is exactly the point – ‘...not *humanly* possible’. Not without the use of magic in any case. As the canoe-board comes into full view and the warriors come ashore I am overcome with awe and take leave of my senses (ibid.). My mind turns from the canoe-board to the canoe owner, that is, it turns from the sign to the referent. Any warrior with enough power to enlist and control the magic of the artisan who made such a carving – such an *impossible* object – is to be feared indeed.

One final question remains. What does this have to do with searching for signs of end the times in Gamrie? It has to do, I want to suggest, with the way that certain magical

symbols work their magic. Remember that ‘the enchantment of technology is the power that technical processes have of casting a spell over us so that we see the real world in an enchanted form’ (ibid.). Essentially, what Gell says about technology I want to say for ‘signs of the times’ (indeed, it would not be difficult to argue that signs of the times are just another form of ‘technology’, like art is for Gell, but I do not have the space to discuss this here). Eschatological signs work their magic (that is, they cast their spells over us) by conflating ‘sign’ and ‘referent’. Thus, when I see a pine tree being planted in the Negev desert in Israel or an EU log sheet being submitted to the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency, I do not just see evidence that points to the material imminence of God and the Devil who collectively threaten to bring about the end of the world – I also actually see (that is, am party to) God and the Devil, not only in space, but also in time.

And the world is transformed. No longer disenchanted, the ‘technology’ of end times Biblical prophecy, when folded forward onto the present and the near future, works its magic by conflating sign and referent, index and object, cause and effect. Thus, the ‘real world’, Gell tells us, becomes seen in an enchanted form (Gell 1992: 44). As symbols, the pine tree and the log sheet do not point to an outside agent (be it God, the Devil or the Christian) but rather *point to themselves*, obviating the need for symbolic representation of anything but itself (Wagner 1978) as the actual (direct) object of the eschaton. The world is enchanted, then – it is, as I referred to in the previous chapter, ‘made alive with a kind of magic’ – insofar as the social and material relations that constitute the religion of Gamrie are themselves miraculously consubstantiated, via the collapsing of the distance between sign and referent, into objects of both divine immanence and imminence. This being said – and insofar as it has been my aim throughout this thesis to allow theory to emanate from local experience – it now seems that we are finally at the point where it is possible to theorise with much more rigour what is to be meant by enchantment.

Conclusion

Enchanted Words, Enchanted Objects

Thus, what I have tried to provide in this thesis is an intelligible discourse on how the religion of Gamrie is experienced. By giving a close ‘reading’ of a collection of different Christian lives within a small fishing village in northeast Scotland, my aim has been to show how beliefs and experience; ideas and objects; words and language, are all bound together in sets of relationships that cannot easily be separated.

Nor should they be separated. This is all the more the case where beliefs (about, perhaps, the end of the world) are indistinguishable from the implications they have within the material (economic, demographic, political) world. In this sense, words become objects and objects become words. What is more, the opposite has also been shown to be true insofar as people not only ‘believe’ things about objects, but they actually experience those objects ideationally. What one believes about boxes of fish is not only implicated within a local theology of eschatology, but those beliefs change the material nature of the objects in question. This is sensible (that is, it is *intelligible*) insofar as the relationship between these things – theological beliefs, material objects, words as language – have been shown to be experienced, locally, in and through a life of enchantment. I have argued, then, that it is enchantment that animates the everyday experiences of my informants, that is, it ‘makes it alive with a kind of magic’.

In Part I we examined the village of Gamrie within its local, regional, national and global context, not only historically and ecclesiastically, but also materially. This latter concern for materiality led us to consider the ‘triple pinch’ where I argued that Gamrie was experiencing the ‘last of the last days’ economically, demographically and eschatologically. In Part II we examined the enchanting power of words. More than this, it examined the enchanting power of speaking and hearing within the context of emotional enskilment. Where sermons were likened to sacrifice and testimony and fishing were likened to evangelism, all three were said to be forms of ‘enchanted labour’ that were themselves predicated on the existence of two categories of persons – the

‘saved’ and the ‘unsaved’. In Part III we examined the enchanting power of signs. Here, I argued that it was through the identification of ‘signs of the end times’ that everyday life became enchanted, again through the deployment of words and language. More than this, because material objects were also central to this search for ‘signs’, I argued that the religion of Gamrie was not only a religion of transcendence but also of immanence and imminence.

Importantly, each part of the thesis also attempted to address the central ethnographic significance of ‘The Word’. Thus, Parts II and III were particularly concerned to show how the mediatory relationship of ‘The Word’ impacted upon local experiences of enchantment. A key contribution of this thesis, then, has been to deploy long established anthropological concepts in new ways. Specifically, I have sought to continue a current trend within anthropology to develop both our ethnographic and theoretical understandings of Christianity, but I have done so by pushing for a re-examination of the relationships between ‘words’ and ‘objects’ as well as between ‘immanence’, ‘imminence’ and ‘transcendence’. More specifically still, I have sought to conduct this re-examination in and through a further interrogation of the long established concept of ‘enchantment’. In order to show the significance of this contribution, I want to turn to the most important theorist of enchantment, that is, to Max Weber.

Weber and Rational Calculation

To repeat; it will be my argument in this conclusion, as in the wider thesis, that my Christian informants lived in an enchanted world that was ‘made alive with a kind of magic’. It will also be my argument that this ‘magic’ was primarily mediated in and through the material and ideational significance of ‘The Word’. In order to show how this was the case – in order to show how words ‘worked their magic’ – I want first to provide a very brief overview of what, in Weberian terms, is the opposite of magic. I mean to refer here to the *disenchanting* power of rational modernity.

Weber, as Cannell rightly points out, ‘was not an optimist about modernity’ (2011: 2). In his now famous lecture ‘Science as a Vocation’ (Weber 1978a), delivered in Munich

right at the end of the First World War to young aspiring academics, Weber outlined his fears over the ways in which ‘ultimate values’ (what we might call committed ethical subject positions) were being forced to retreat from public life (ibid.: 155). This development, he said, was in order to allow room for the near totalising force of a modernity that was itself driven by the utterly uncompromising assumption that all things could (and would) be mastered by ‘calculation’ (ibid.: 139). The result, in Weber’s view, was that sociality was often reduced to ‘means-ends relationships’ (see Sung Ho 2007) and the ‘impersonal’ (Weber 1978a: 149) and ‘objectifying’ (Cannell 2010: 89-91) forces of ‘bureaucracy’ (Weber 1978b: 226) and ‘legal formalism’ (Sung Ho 2007). No other forms of relatedness were permissible in such an ideology of modernity (Weber 1978c: 351), with all behaviours that conducted themselves outside the strictures of empirical calculation – including all religious beliefs and practices – understood as essentially ‘irrational’ (ibid.).

The irrationality of non-calculable social relatedness led to a further reduction of the world to pure materiality (Cannell 2011: 2). The ideal type of ‘value-rationality’ (Weber 1969: 92) of technical decisions made only on the basis of means and ends eclipsed normal human contact that had previously been based on the ‘ethic of brotherly love’ (Weber 1978c: 355. Also Bellah 1999); all that came into the equation was the potentiality of material gains and losses set against a back drop of ‘natural causality’ (Weber 1978c: 355). Such a view of cause and effect as occurring only within the confines of a ‘this-worldly’ and ‘human-centred’ (ibid.: 357) existence reinforced the increasingly uncontested (and incontestable) sense that the cosmos was a purely material and thus utterly banal scientific reality.

For Weber, the effects were multifarious. Most relevant to our discussion here is the reaction of some in ‘the Church’ who sought to place theodicy within this new framework of natural causality. Suffering, which became an exclusively material reality and not a spiritual one, engendered scepticism about religion, thus establishing the very thing that theodicy sought to dispel, namely doubt in the metaphysical truth claims of Christianity and religion more generally. The motive behind this failed theodicy – to move into line with the increasing ‘intellectualism’ (Weber 1978a: 139) of Christian

theology as a result of the Protestant Reformation – was itself borne out of the earlier move towards calculation, whereby all phenomena (including the movement of streetcars and the falling of rain (ibid.) became viewed as potentially learnable and thus entirely without mystery.

The result was not so much an immediate loss of enchantment (although for Weber this did follow gradually) but rather a loss of transcendence (Weber 1968: 607). Weber's aspiring academics, were, in a very real sense, living in a 'post-metaphysical' and 'entirely human-centred' world (Sung Ho 2007) – a world that was completely predictable, easily manipulable, fully calculable and thus eminently rational. With no mystery there was no need for magic and with no need for magic, there was no feeling of transcendence. And crucially, it was this loss of transcendence that birthed the full effects of modern disenchantment – in all its complexity and contradiction.

Polytheism, Plasticity and Disenchantment

For Weber, at the heart of the modern scientific paradigm lay the concept of progress *ad infinitum*, that is, the belief that humans were travelling along an upwards evolutionary trajectory which, by definition, would endlessly render the achievements of the past as insignificant footnotes along the road to greater things. All present attainment of knowledge was partial and temporary and to be rewritten by those who would reveal its faults and surpass its limitations. Such a vision, while accurately describing the modern condition, was, for Weber, unbearably meaningless. Indeed:

Science has created this cosmos of natural causality and has seemed unable to answer with certainty the question of its own ultimate presuppositions. [...] Viewed in this way, all 'culture' appears as man's emancipation from the organically prescribed cycle of natural life. For this very reason culture's every step forward seems condemned to lead to an ever more devastating senselessness. The advancement of cultural values seems to become a senseless hustle in the service of worthless, moreover self-contradictory, and mutually antagonistic ends. (Weber 1978c: 355-357)

To the extent that Weber uses science as a trope for modernity, the senselessness and meaninglessness of the modern condition can be seen as springing from the failure of science to apprehend the meaning of its own 'ultimate presuppositions' (ibid.: 355) of rational calculation and 'progress'. With the metaphysics of religion having been replaced by the banality and predictability of a purely material world, the world is left bereft of the enchantment of transcendence and becomes disenchanted. As religion moves further down the road of 'intellectualism', its original 'charisma' (ibid.: 351) and 'mysticism' (ibid.) are replaced by 'doctrine' (ibid.) and 'book religion' (ibid.), giving ever more weight to the rationalist assumption that the entirety of the cosmos is knowable and thus subject to our learning.

Crucially, this collapse of the monopoly over metaphysics that 'traditional' (in our context, Christian) religion(s) once held opens up space for the development of new 'alternative salvations' (Weber 1968: 602-610. Also Bellah 1999: 9-11) and thus new kinds of (re)enchanted polytheisms. Politics offers me salvation from a meaningless death by my making the ultimate (self) sacrifice in battle (Bellah 1999: 9). Aesthetics offers me salvation from everyday routine through a (self) obsession of pure artistic form as divorced from content (ibid.: 10). Eroticism offers me salvation from reproductive functionality via ecstatic sexual (self) fulfilment. But for Weber it seems that these 'alternative salvations', these 'old gods' (Weber 1978a: 149) offer little but false and selfish promises, separated, as they are, from the all consuming, 'world denying love' (Bellah 1999) of the truly enchanting world religions. Indeed, for Weber, in an ironic twist to his argument, it is exactly these (supposedly (re)enchanted) 'alternative salvations' (themselves arising out of the failure of rational-intellectualist Protestant theodicy) that brought about the full arrival of disenchantment. I am speaking here of what Weber calls the 'loss of plasticity' (Weber 1978a: 148) in modern life.

For Weber, the alternative salvations of politics, aesthetics and eroticism, based as they are on different 'ultimate values' both produce and are produced by social fragmentation. Crucially, this fragmentation is irreconcilable, that is, it is incommensurable, because the values they are based on are competing. Eroticism competes over sexuality and against Puritan asceticism. The politics of death in battle takes a different view of the value of

aesthetic form to that of the artist. Furthermore, religion is required to inhabit an independent sphere all on its own, away from politicians and artists and eroticists, yet forced to conduct its 'business' (for that is what it increasingly becomes) through the same rationalist framework of all forms of modern calculation, or, as might also be the case for the other soteriologies mentioned above, intentionally set itself up in direct opposition to the ideology of rationality.

Yet a key distinction remains for Weber between the old religions of salvation and these essentially reactionary sources of salvific 'ultimate value': where the world religions of old are (or, at least once were) inextricably tied to wider experiences of the cosmos, this is not so for the modern salvations of politics and sex and art. Weber, drawing on Nietzsche's discussion of the relationship between the beauty and the unholy, has this to say:

But all these are only the most elementary cases of struggle that the gods of the various orders and values are engaged in... We live as did the ancients when their world was not yet disenchanted of its gods and demons, only we live in a different sense... *The bearing of man has been disenchanted and denuded of its mystical but inwardly genuine plasticity...* Today the routines of everyday life challenge religion. Many old gods ascend from their graves; they are disenchanted and hence take the form of impersonal forces. They strive to gain power over our lives and again they resume their eternal struggle with one another. (Weber 1978a 148-149. Emphasis added.)

The final and most devastating consequence of all of this is, for Weber, the loss of the 'inwardly genuine plasticity' of modern man (ibid.). In 'Science as a vocation' (Weber 1978a) as well as in some of his other writings (Weber, 1968, 1969, 1978b, 1978c), this seems to involve a loss of the physical and metaphysical holism once enjoyed by 'pre-modern' subjects. Physically, where humans were once 'sated with life', they are now 'wearied' by it (Weber 1978c: 356-357); no longer are moderns held by the meaningfully bounded closure that labouring within the 'organic life cycle' afforded (ibid.), left as they are to the 'senselessness' of unending rational advancement and the crushing realisation that all their achievements will be counted only for their inevitable redundancy. Metaphysically, where pre-moderns lived with only one model of salvation in any given

society, moderns, as described above, lived with many. It is in this sense that the ‘gods ascend[ing] from their graves’ (Weber 1978a: 149) have lost their cosmological rootedness, that is, their sense of being unavoidably implicated in the real functioning of the universe and its contents. The world created by rational modernity is not littered with dead gods but with separate and competing gods; it is marked not by secularisation but by segregation.

Disenchantment then, is the reduction of ‘ultimate *values*’ to ‘personal *tastes*’ (Sung Ho 1999), with modern subjects divorced from the moral imperative to (collectively) act upon any of their clamorous and seemingly arbitrary ideals. Indeed, the very concept of ‘ultimate’ value (whether personalised as ‘*the* Ultimate’ or objectified as ‘*an* ultimate’) becomes increasingly at odds with the sheer relativity of rational action, leaving moderns either incapable or unwilling to take principled moral action. Out of either intellectual paralysis or moral nihilism, Weber’s moderns expose themselves to the relativity of free floating and competitive polytheism whose fragmented (and fragmenting) ‘impersonal forces’ (Weber 1978: 149) engender casual scepticism by creating their own forms of disenchanted, human-centred, post-metaphysical sociality.

Yet the great majority of my Christian informants do not appear to inhabit such a disenchanted world where ‘the routines of everyday life challenge religion’ (Weber 1978a: 149). Indeed, what I have been arguing from the start of this thesis is that for them, exactly the opposite is occurring, namely that their experiences of religion challenge the routines of everyday life. It will be my task for the rest of my concluding comments to try and theorise what this ‘challenge to everyday life’ looks like locally, and in so doing, to bring the various strands of my ethnography together into a somewhat less polytheistic close.

Enchantment as consubstantiation

Yet, having described Weber’s notion of disenchantment, we are still left with the need to ask after its conceptual counterpart, enchantment. I want to suggest that, as with disenchantment, we can best understand what enchantment *is* by looking at what it *does*.

My argument here is straightforward – enchantment is the opposite of disenchantment. As I have argued throughout the thesis, enchantment is that which makes the world ‘alive with a kind of magic’, and, in this sense, we can add that enchantment ‘works its magic’ by maintaining the ‘inwardly genuine plasticity’ of social and religious life. Where in Chapters VI and VII I suggested, through my use of Gell (1992), that this process of enchantment occurs through a conflation of ‘sign’ and ‘referent’, I want to develop this idea further as a way of drawing together the main themes of all my chapters. I will argue (as I hinted at when telling Betty’s story of the Bible verse in the gutter in Chapter VI) that enchantment is a kind of consubstantiation.

By consubstantiation I mean to refer to that view of the Christian Eucharist that attempts to explain the real (material and spiritual) presence of the body and blood of Jesus alongside the real material presence of the bread and the wine. This differs from the more commonly known doctrine of transubstantiation by suggesting that rather than a single unchanged external form – the ‘accident’ – combining with a single transformed inner essence – the ‘substance’ – (whereby the body and blood of Christ literally but invisibly replace the bread and wine), what occurs is rather a bifurcation. Thus, in consubstantiation, while the ‘accident’, as in transubstantiation, remains both singular and unchanged, the ‘substance’, contra transubstantiation, miraculously develops a dual nature whereby the body and blood of Christ are physically present alongside the bread and wine. But what of the relationship between enchantment and consubstantiation? My argument (stated most explicitly here but stated throughout the thesis also) is that enchantment works its magic by allowing the material and the spiritual to coexist (that is co-substantiate) within both words and objects.

It is this coexistence that I have chosen to describe here as consubstantiation. Thus, in maintaining the ‘inwardly genuine plasticity’ of the social and religious lives of the Christians of Gamrie, what we see as actually happening is the deployment of words and objects in such a way that a ‘dual substance’ is achieved through a process of bifurcation. In Chapter III, then, we saw that sermons (whether ‘preaching’ the gospel or ‘teaching’ the Bible) were delivered (and received) in such a way that both God and the preacher were speaking subjects. ‘Whatever God says to you in the preaching and teaching of the

scriptures *do it* and be obedient to what God tells you!’ came the shrill cry from the pulpit one Sunday night in the Kirk. So too with testimony and witness – words spoken by men at sea are also and equally words spoken by God. John not only spoke about God but for God whenever he sought to share the gospel with Iain and the others on board the Flourish. The same was true for Alasdair – ‘I couldna come out my bedroom this morning without speaking to my Lord. If I didnae have Jesus with me just noo I couldnae speak to you’ – a man who would be left silent without the enabling presence of the Lord. So too, finally, for the Bible itself – not just a book, but a ‘living’, ‘speaking’, ‘breathing’ book; a book which could, in all sincerity, be placed into my hands with the comment – striking because of its literal intent – ‘if you want to know Jesus, *here he is*’.

Sermons and words of witness; Bibles and Bible reading notes – these things are enchanted, that is, they are alive with the magic of consubstantiation. Crucially, this magic powerfully unites two kinds of ‘substance’ (words of man with words of God; printed pages with pages warm with the breath of God) within a single ‘accident’ (a sermon; a book) and in so doing, allows the material to indwell the spiritual and vice versa. Yet, words are not the only objects implicated in the magic of consubstantiation – material things too, as we saw most clearly in Chapters V, VI and VII, are deployed as objects of enchantment. Nets and hauls of prawns become material indexes of the presence of God, just as Seventh Day Adventist video cassettes and Masonic robes materially index the presence of the Devil. ‘If you have been involved in witchcraft do you take all your paraphernalia and your *stuff* and burn it, according to what the scripture teaches? Or do you put it in a box and put it up the loft somewhere, and then you wonder why you can’t get any blessing?’ – John’s warning was clear; objects, far from being neutral materiality in an entirely spiritual cosmos, matter and matter greatly, enough, indeed, to bring both blessings and curses.

Clearly then, the religious world that my Christian informants inhabited, enchanted as it was by the words and objects of both God and the Devil, challenged the routines of their everyday lives, thereby inverting Weber’s formulation of modern disenchantment. But how is this challenge made manifest, and what exactly is enchanting about it? My argument here is an extension of my use of consubstantiation, namely that *something else*

is happening. The challenge is to the totalising rationalism of disenchantment that states that all there is to life is the ‘accident’, that is, the purely surface materiality of the bread and wine or the haul of prawns or the VHS cassette. Enchantment challenges the routines of everyday life, then, not by locating divine presence outside this sphere of experience, but precisely by locating it within it. As I argued in Chapter VI, providence and spiritual attack *are* amazing but *not* surprising, that is, they inspire awe yet remain part of the everyday to the point of being *eminently expected*. George’s bookmark was quite clear: ‘As you read, remember to be expectant, God wants to fellowship with you and speak to you every day’. It was here then, in the reading and talking and walking and fishing of everyday life that the enchantment of routine (and the routine of enchantment) was experienced by my Christian informants.

My theoretical contribution in this thesis is concerned, then, with the provision of a new understanding of disenchantment and its relationship to enchantment. In order to get a better sense of this rather specific relationship, I want to examine two final pieces of ethnography. The first is from my own fieldwork and the second is from Cannell’s work on the ‘re-enchantment of kinship’ among American Latter Day Saints (LDS; ‘Mormon’) (Cannell forthcoming), by examining, among other things, discourses surrounding Mormon adoption.

While helping my landlady on her stall at a craft fair in the village school one spring afternoon, I met and got chatting to a woman called Margaret Dawson who had accompanied her husband to the fair to help sell his wood carvings. As we talked, her eyes lit up when I mentioned the name of my brother’s minister in Aberdeen, a man known in local Christian circles for his spiritual interest in Israel. What followed was one of the most remarkable conversations I had while on fieldwork. After a few careful questions about my own Christian background, Margaret began to tell me of her belief that she was descended from the Virgin Mary (via the Lost Tribe of Benjamin) and had been personally tasked by God to reveal to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. By way of supporting evidence, she explained to me that her own middle name was Mary and her son’s name, Derek, meant ‘the ruler’. She went on to insinuate that she actually *was* Mary (the mother of Jesus) but stopped just short of claiming that her son was the Christ. ‘Do

you think it's relevant that your husband is a carpenter?' I asked with a creased brow to indicate my seriousness. 'Yes', she nodded knowingly, 'I do'.

Margaret continued by telling me that God had revealed this mission to her through her knowledge of Doric which she said was God's chosen language through which Jesus' true identity as the Saviour would be made known to the Jews. God had shown her that the Bible (best read in Scots) contained thousands of hidden Doric references only visible when the reader began to divide up the words of scripture according to their phonetic Doric pronunciation. At this point she gave me an example. 'The Bible says "*Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a Donkey*". If you take the word 'donkey' and split it into two you get the words 'don' and 'key' don't you?' she said. I agreed that this was true, but, to her apparent amazement, I did not see her point. Eventually relenting, she revealed that the true hidden meaning of the word 'donkey' was as follows: The river that runs through Aberdeen is the River Don, and, insofar as 'Don' is also a byname for Aberdeen, when we combine this realisation with our second word – 'key' – we come to the conclusion that '*Don is the key*' i.e. Aberdeen(shire) is the key in revealing Jesus' true identity to the Jews.

Margaret, beaming at my stunned silence, went on to describe how she had collected an entire file of similar linguistic evidence to support her case. She gave several more examples, one of which helped me to more fully grasp the extent of her claims. 'Just before Jesus ascended into heaven he told his disciples "fear not you will see me in a little while"' she said. The word 'while' in Doric is pronounced (and spelt) '*file*', meaning, Margaret explained earnestly, that Jesus' final words on earth *really* read 'you will see me in a little *file*'. After years of study, this discovery was the key watershed moment for Margaret who realised that what Jesus was actually talking about was *her file* of Biblical Doric codes. From that moment on, everything else fell into place; the file was nearly complete and she was looking for someone to hand it over to the Jewish religious authorities in Israel.

As we chatted it was clear that she wanted me to take up this quest to deliver the file. My hesitation led Margaret to suggest I spend some time studying her website which would give me all the answers I would need as long as I read it '*carefully*'. The internet would be a particularly helpful medium for me, Margaret explained, because my surname was Webster; I was, quite literally, a 'Web' 'Star', in the same way, she said, that Benjamin

Netanyahu ('Net' 'in' 'Yahoo') was. I asked if others knew of her true identity and recognised the things she spoke of as being true. 'Oh yes', she assured me, 'there are others', mentioning in particular that 'thousands of Freemasons' were convinced of the validity of her 'file' but were collectively engaged in a determined and diabolical conspiracy to cover the matter up – for what reasons, she did not elaborate.

Just as I got up to leave, the tone of the conversation became suddenly darker. 'Don't worry if you fall into the hands of the security services', Margaret said, 'they won't be able to harm you. I'm trying to *tell* you something without *actually* telling you'. After a pregnant pause she implied that it was very possible that she had put me in grave danger by revealing her secret quest to me – a secret so powerful that government agents might, even at that precise moment, be looking to capture and silence me. Margaret ended our conversation with the comforting (if further disorientating) suggestion that the reason I would come to no harm was because I, like her, was part of the lost Tribe of Benjamin and thus had special protection from God. She urged me one final time to look at her website and wrote the address down on the back of her husband's business card. And with the card in my hand, I thanked her, returning to my seat beside Kathleen's key chains and fridge magnets.

* * *

The child is eager to jump into the Pool of Life, but God tells him to choose his family from the Great Tree first. At first the little boy searches along its many branches in vain; then he is drawn to the leaves at the very top of the tree and asks God to let him look there.

Heavenly Father smiled a warm and comforting smile. "*Those are the adopting families,*" He thought. He did not say a word but simply moved to the highest and most centre part of the tree... Matthew looked and looked... he...saw one of the leaves sparkle. He reached out and touched the branch, and he knew that was his home. Excited, he turned his little head to God and exclaimed, "This is it! This is my family! They are the ones I want to be with! They are waiting for me!" (Cannell forthcoming: 14).

Having cited the child's further selection of a birthmother from the Great Tree (ibid.: 15), Cannell has this to say by way of analysis:

"Choosing" kin in this world implies recognising the prior truth of a pre-mortal belonging; yet... "choosing" kin in the pre-mortal existence is itself imagined not as arbitrary selection, but as agentive "recognition" of connections that *already existed*.

It might seem tempting, perhaps, to describe pre-mortal kinship as "metaphysical", were it not that, in LDS doctrine, spirit and matter are not opposed to each other. The spirit beings who populate the pre-mortal existence are earthly-matter-in-potential, themselves a form of matter, waiting for their opportunity to develop through acquisition of a mortal body in this life... (ibid.: Emphasis added).

This, interestingly, is the same temptation that faces us when considering theories of enchantment more generally by strictly opposing the disenchanted 'post-metaphysical' cosmos of Weber's rational scientists (1978a) to the enchanted 'spiritual' worldview of Gamrie's Christians. But the ethnography throughout this thesis – as well as my deployment of the concept of consubstantiation – helps us see that something else is going on other than this physical/meta-physical opposition. As with the consecration that is said by some to occur during the celebration of the Eucharist, the enchanting power of consubstantiation unites rather than opposes the material and the 'spiritual'.

Thus, it might be possible to describe what my informants are experiencing as a life of consubstantiation. This, in a sense, has been my argument throughout the entire thesis. Thus, where Mormon adoption agencies are not *just* rational bureaucratic systems for the delivery of children to childless couples but *also* engaged in the (surely enchanted) 'agentive "recognition" of connections that *already existed*' (ibid.), the same processes of bifurcation are clearly occurring in Gamrie. Mormon 'blood' kinship exists alongside (a no less material) pre-mortal relatedness; washing machines are not just household utilities but also physically index God's presence. Could it be, then, that modernity is marked by more than human-centred rational calculation?

My answer in this thesis has been yes, insofar as it is marked – for some – by enchantment. Thus, as I argued in Chapters VI and VII, the actual functioning of enchantment – the point at which the theoretical rubber hits the proverbial road – is where symbols, as concrete things in themselves, achieve a conflation of sign and referent, that is, they coexist (or consubstantiate/co-substantiate) without one or the other substance ever changing. God is *in* my washing machine and yet my washing machine still functions as it used to, with neither substance (or perhaps ‘presence’) accorded more importance or agentive power than the other. Indeed, it is in their very (equal) coexistence that they attain their importance and agentive power, for without earthly matter we simply have ethereal metaphysics, and without ‘spiritual’ presence we have nothing but rationally calculable materiality. The enchanting power of consubstantiation is indeed – to repeat another theological term – a kind of ‘incarnation’, where God is made, not so much into miraculous flesh or bread, but (locally) into words and everyday objects.

Plasticity and the monotheism of ‘The Word’

Insofar as disenchantment, for Weber, is centrally concerned with the modern subject’s loss of ‘inwardly genuine plasticity’ (Weber 1978a: 148) and its replacement with the ‘senselessness’ of progress *ad infinitum* (ibid.: 137), I have sought to show throughout this thesis that the enchanted world of the Christians of Gamrie is rather different, being marked, as it is, by the kind of cosmological rootedness that makes fishing for prawns while also preaching ‘The Word’, looking for signs of the end times and witnessing to the ‘unsaved’ not only locally intelligible but also spiritually and materially imperative.

It is in the local ‘cosmological rootedness’ of enchantment, then, that we see the fragmentation of the irreconcilable values of modernity finally dealt with. My argument here has been, that, among the Christians of Gamrie, we see six different religious groupings, who, despite sharing a history of denominational schism, remain united by the centrality of ‘The Word’ and the lived reality of the immanence and imminence of transcendence. So central was this ‘Word’ that an informant of mine who struggled with learning difficulties told me of a time in his life where he had been on the verge of

abandoning his faith because of his illiteracy. The key moment in his conversion came when a friend taught him to read, opening up to him not only the Bible, but also his very salvation. Such stories of personal transformation were common and acted to bring God (and the Devil) into everyday experiences. Divine presence, then, was experienced as being both ‘near’ and ‘soon’, through the ‘preaching’ and ‘teaching of scripture’ (Chapter III), through words of ‘testimony’ and ‘witness’ (Chapter IV), through the ‘zero-sum game’ of fishing for prawns and men (Chapter V), through the experience of divine providence and demonic attack (Chapter VI), and finally, through the anticipation of the eschaton (Chapter VII).

Crucially, it was ‘The Word’ that played the key mediating role not only between human-divine relationships, but also between different religious experiences. Whether I was at a Free Presbyterian prayer meeting, a Kirk ‘men’s breakfast’ or a Closed Brethren prophecy meeting, ‘The Word’ remained central, not simply to the point of being a common obsession. So strongly was this felt, that some of my informants suggested that the religion of Gamrie could be summarised, in a play on Trinitarian theology, as ‘Father Son and Holy *Bible*’. More crucially still, insofar as the religion of Gamrie received its cosmological rootedness in and through words of preaching, prayer, testimony, witness and storytelling (all of which occurred not only in church, but also at home, on the street and at sea), a central claim of this thesis has been that words (and ‘The Word’) act to dispel the fragmentary ‘meaninglessness’ and ‘senselessness’ of modern disenchantment (Weber 1978c: 355).

In this sense, I have sought to show how – *à la* Weber – the ‘polytheism’ of Gamrie’s (and indeed Scotland’s) ‘non-Christian’ ‘others’ – variously based on devotion to money or art or wildlife conservation or motorbikes – is indicative of the wider (and partially disenchanting) ‘triple pinch’ of economic, demographic and eschatological pressure that the village is subject to. This is the case insofar as these ‘alternative salvations’ do seem to create a fragmentary break away from the ultimate value of ‘The Word’ and towards the polytheism of competing value spheres so clearly described in ‘Science as a Vocation’ (Weber 1978a: 147-149). Furthermore, this irreconcilable competition for the ‘souls’ of Gamrie’s acted to provide an ever widening range of modes of personhood in

the village; one could be an artist, a ‘biker’, a marine conservationist and so on – and it was these ‘identities’ that provided a sense of ‘ultimate value’ (who I ‘*really* am’) with regards to both the self and others.

Where Gamrie’s Christian cosmos differs, then, is in its refusal to enter into any such assignation of multiple identities. For my Christian informants, their internally coherent cosmos, rooted, as it was, to the monotheism of ‘The Word’, replaced the socio-spatial fragmentation of the self and the other with only two categories of persons that had any ‘ultimate value’ – the ‘saved’ and the ‘unsaved’. What is more, it is important to note – as I argued in Chapters II, IV and VII – that even this duality was a cause of tremendous pain and anxiety to my Christian informants, who, particularly in their old age, felt the ever pressing need to exhort those whom they had contact with (most especially their grandchildren) to embrace the singular salvation of ‘born again’ faith.

The God of the Christians of Gamrie – and the Devil who opposes them – as a result, do not lack cosmological roots but are intimately (that is immanently and imminently) attached to the things of this world. Indeed, the cosmos of local Christian metaphysics is thoroughly objectified by a whole constellation of material objects, both on shore (washing machines, trees, VHS cassettes) and at sea (waves, boats, nets, prawns). This is not to say that Gamrie’s religiosity – objectified as it is on land and at sea – is not also implicated in the ‘skies above’, for the ‘spiritual work’ of prayer, salvation and worship were also clearly described to me as being directed towards the ‘heavenly realms’. My argument has rather been that God and the Devil are experienced by Gamrie’s Christians as profoundly rooted in *both* this world and the world beyond. The world of my Christian friends was enchanted, then, exactly because the cosmological rootedness of their religious devotion to ‘The Word’ acted to maintain the ‘plasticity’ (Weber 1978a: 148) of their social and spiritual lives. Their religious experience was a common experience of a ‘Word’ that defined their personhood, and, in one of two ways, the personhood of all those around them. This ‘Word’, furthermore, was also implicated not only in the immanence of space (that is, the land, sea and heavens above), but also in the imminence of time – extending back into Biblical and ‘revival’ history, while also moving forwards

into the near future of the soon-to-occur apocalypse. It has been my repeated argument that the product of the enchanting ‘Word’ was, simply put, an enchanted world.

The ‘ethical causality’ of a ‘God-ordained’ world

What we see in the ethnography presented in this thesis is not a loss of transcendence (Weber 1978c: 351) heralded by the predictability of rational calculation (Weber 1978a: 140), nor the disenchantment of the world into meaningless banality, but, rather, a very different experience of ‘the routines of everyday life’ (ibid.: 149). Fundamental to understanding this experience, as I argued in Chapter VI when discussing the local concept of ‘Godincidence’, is a view of everyday routine as directed by ‘irresistible divine intention’. Where for Weber, such an assertion is central to the maintenance of an enchanted worldview, part of the work of disenchantment can be seen in its replacement of ‘ethical causality’ with ‘natural causality’ (Weber 1978c: 351-354). Weber’s argument on this point is strikingly straightforward but also characteristically insightful. Where ethical causality states that we live in a God-ordained world within an ethically orientated cosmos (ibid.), natural causality, on the other hand, states that the world is guided by the impersonal and value-free laws of science. ‘There’s no such thing as coincidence, only Godincidence’ my informants would often tell me. Such was their cosmos.

Given this, and given its opposite – spiritual attack – were occurring within the enchanted timetable of dispensationalist eschatology, the result, I argued in Chapter VII, was that the everyday details of life (both the extraordinary and the routine) were indeed God-ordained and ethically orientated, surrounded, as they were, by events that transcend everyday life, without stripping away or denying their quintessentially this-worldly character. In Chapter IV we saw how recounting one’s Christian biography was not just about constructing a coherent history of the speaking self, but also about securing the eternal salvation of the listening other. Likewise, in Chapters V and VII, we saw how prawn trawlers and fish markets were not just places of work and commerce, but also of evangelistic and eschatological struggle. And it was George’s bookmark, described in Chapter VI, that demanded every Christian should read (and, by extension, live), with the utmost expectancy of experiencing what I have frequently referred to as the ‘immanence

and imminence of transcendence', that showed us that enchantment was, by its very nature, simultaneously routine and awe inspiring.

We are left with the recognition of the '*not simply...but also...*', that is, we are left with the sense, that along with Cannell's Latter Day Saints, *something more is happening* in the lives of Gamrie's Christians than the predictability of rational calculation that defines a disenchanted world. What I want to suggest here is that enchantment addresses the ways in which a life of consubstantiation renders sociality as 'elusively greater' (Jenkins 2000: 29) than its individual parts. In order to explain this further I want first to briefly return to Margaret Dawson and her 'little file'.

Margaret was also named 'Mary'. Her husband was a carpenter and her son's name meant 'the ruler'. The family, despite appearing quite ordinary, had a 'calling' on their lives of truly cosmological significance. Indeed, Margaret's family and the original 'Holy Family' were, in important respects, one and the same. The Bible was best read in Scots, but English translations also contained thousands of hidden linguistic codes that could be discovered by splitting words and sounding them with a phonetic Doric pronunciation. Names, likewise, contained hidden meanings. The world could be divided up into those to whom Margaret's quest had been revealed and those to whom it had not. What's more, the world was governed by the struggle between hidden forces of evil (secret government agents and Freemasons) and equally mysterious forces of good (the Lost Tribe of Benjamin). While the battle would be intense, good would ultimately triumph because of the special protection granted by God to his people. Final victory would be won with the ushering in of the apocalypse; an event that would be triggered by the mass conversion of all of Israel's Jews to Christianity in a single day as a result of the presentation of Margaret's file of Doric codes that revealed Jesus to be the Messiah.

Such was the enchanted nature of Margaret's Christian cosmology. Leaving questions of mental illness or trickery to one side⁶³, I want to use my encounter with Margaret to try to finally pull together the different threads of what I have said about enchantment and consubstantiation. I have argued throughout this thesis that enchantment is the process whereby life is 'made alive with a kind of magic'. I have also argued – most overtly in

⁶³ This seems warranted for the same reasons I gave in Chapter IV ('*Sick or slick?*') with regards to Alexander's highly emotional recounting of his 'testimony'.

this conclusion, but also elsewhere – that the local mode of enchantment can be thought of in terms of a life of consubstantiation. As a way of ‘pulling together the threads’, it will be my argument in these final paragraphs that what the doctrine of consubstantiation says happens to the bread and the wine at the ‘moment of consecration’ is broadly analogous to what the Christians of Gamrie experience with regards to the enchanted nature of their everyday religious lives. Where I use consubstantiation as a *theological* lens through which to view the anthropological concept of enchantment, it is also explicitly my intention to use enchantment as an *anthropological* lens through which to view folk-theological experience of my Christian informants.

As I argued in my introduction and sought to achieve in the chapters that followed, this positioning of theology and anthropology alongside each other has a dual purpose. First, it is born out of a desire to see ‘beliefs’ and ‘objects’ treated as unavoidably implicated in each others’ work. Thus, using Keane (2002, 2006, 2008) and Coleman (2000, 2006, 2010), I have sought to promote the view that beliefs have (or ‘take’) objects while objects are also a kind of belief. Second, this positioning also acts as ‘a kind of writing’ that seeks to bring about what Taylor has called a ‘language of perspicuous contrast’ (Taylor 1985: 125), or what I have referred to as a language of mutual give and take, that, by avoiding both ethnocentric reductionism and pure apology, manages to construct a way of looking at (and writing about) the world – in our case a certain type of Protestant Christianity – as a formulation of ‘both their way of life and ours as alternative possibilities in relation to some human constants at work in both’ (ibid.). The human constants I have chosen to analyse have been words and objects, or, more generally, language and materiality.

‘The Word’ as bifurcation, consecration and conflation

But what of Margaret and her Doric codes? If we are to understand her experience in terms of the enchantment of consubstantiation, what might her (and all my other Christian informants’) ‘moment of consecration’ look like? The answer, I have argued, lies in the idea of both bifurcation and conflation. In the Eucharist, the substance of the bread coexists *alongside* the substance of the flesh, but *within the single* ‘*accident*’, that

is, the ‘inner essence’ of the substance undergoes bifurcation but within the conflation of the single externality of the accident. The same happens to Margaret, her family and her ‘little file’. Margaret is both herself and the Virgin Mary, although she looks like herself. The Bible is both the Christian scriptures and a series of hidden Doric codes, although, even under careful scrutiny, it simply looks like an (albeit Holy) book. The British Government is not only the primary seat of political and legislative power, but also – in conjunction with the Freemasons – involved in a demonic conspiracy to overthrow the eschaton.

What we see in these examples – as well as in the many other ‘ethnographic moments’ that make up the core of this thesis – is that Margaret’s enchanted religious worldview is made up of a series of bifurcations of ‘substance’ and conflations of ‘accident’. This is to say, that while the external form remains unchanged – the book, the Government, Mary herself – the inner-essence is experienced as holding a dual reality of the ‘not only... but also...’. Not only did the LDS baby have a birth mother but also a pre-mortal adoptive mother. Not only did my landlady have a working washing machine but also a material index of the presence of God in her life and home. Not only does the preacher speak from the pulpit, but also God.

If bifurcation allows two realities (two real ‘substances’) to exist within a single ‘accident’, then the ‘moment of consecration’ (the way in which enchantment achieves its magic) is experienced locally whenever ‘The Word’ is invoked. More specifically, it is by words and ‘The Word’ that the religious experiences of Gamrics are ‘consecrated’, that is, made enchanted, and given the dual substance of materiality and divine presence. When ‘The Word’ is deployed, that is, when words containing scripture or scriptural themes are read, spoken, ‘preached on’ or ‘prayed over’, what we see, to return to Weber, is a move from the register of ‘rational’, ‘natural causality’ to the register of ‘God-ordained’, ‘ethical-causality’ (Weber 1978c: 351-354). When a pronouncement of ‘providence’ or ‘attack’ is given, when a ‘testimony’ is shared, when a sermon is preached, when a prayer is offered, when a hymn is sung, or a religious experience related – it is in and through the deployment of words and objects (and words *as* objects)

that the ethical causality of the consecration of ‘The Word’ enchants the world of my Christian informants.

But what is actually going on within ethical causality? How does it ‘work its magic’? How was I to experience a sermon not only as the words of a preacher but also as the words of God? How was it that Mary experienced forgetfulness in prayer not simply as part of growing old but also as demonic attack? How was it that Georgie Sr. experienced a bountiful haul of prawns not simply as a consequence of his skill and experience as a skipper, but also as divine provision? What Gell (1992) helps us see here, as I argued in Chapter VII, is not the enchanting process of bifurcation but rather of *conflation*; the sign is conflated with the referent; the ‘something that stands for something’ itself becomes the actual object. Crucially, this conflation occurs *within* a single ‘accident’ – the spoken sermon, the forgetful congregant, the haul of prawns – that remains, in outward form, unchanged by the consecrating and conflating pronouncement of the enchanting ‘Word’.

But let us draw back a little to attend to the bigger picture. Why does all this talk of the bifurcation, consecration and conflation of words and objects really matter? It matters to the extent that it is able to provide an intelligible account of human experience. Where my ethnography is about the religious experiences of a (relatively) small number of Protestant fishermen in northeast Scotland, it is also an ethnography of a village in dramatic transition. Studying Gamrie at this time of transition, has, I have suggested, provided us with a window through which to view much bigger social processes. My early discussion of the ‘triple pinch’ and my latter engagement with Weber, has, I hope, more than hinted at what these processes are – economic globalisation and recession, rural depopulation, demographic ageing, modern bureaucracy, technical calculation, social rationalisation, liberalisation, secularisation, disenchantment – all these have been discussed in terms that go well beyond the limits of the village, to, in some cases, the global stage.

Importantly, had my ethnography been conducted twenty or thirty years ago, as Knipe’s (1984) ethnography on the cultural ecology of Gamrie’s fishing industry was, the picture would have been very different insofar as the ‘triple pinch’ I described in Chapter II

would simply not have exerted anywhere near the same pressure over the lives of those in the village as it does today. Indeed, the fishing was booming in 1980s, and although some depopulation was already being experienced, the churches were still able to attract those in their teens, twenties and thirties in a way that cannot be said to be the case presently. In this sense, while it has been ‘the last of the last days’ eschatologically for many decades now, the same was certainly not the case economically or demographically. Equally, had I waited twenty or thirty years in the future to conduct my ethnography, it is my assertion (and the assertion of many of my informants, and, perhaps not incidentally, the assertion of many supporters of the secularisation thesis) that there would be very little of the religion of Gamrie left to analyse. Consequently, the chance to examine the relationships between religion and economics or demographics or modernity or disenchantment would be lost to us, at least within the local Scottish context.

Put another way, it seems that studying this particular village at this particular time affords us some special (if not unique) insights. At this precise moment, then, we can see Gamrie as located – within the triple pinch – at the centre of a convergence of several different anthropological and sociological processes, most specifically with regards to how local economics and demographics cut across local deployments of words, language and objects. In terms of the ‘bigger picture’, then, it has been my broadest argument that the religion of Gamrie helps us see – in preaching, testimony, fishing, providence, attack and eschatology – that Christianity does not exclusively produce transcendence nor does modernity exclusively produce disenchantment. Thus, the extent to which we are able to see in Gamrie’s Christianity not just its transcendence, but also its immanence and imminence, will determine the success of my argument. Likewise, the extent to which we are able to see in Gamrie’s modernity, not just rational calculation, but also the enchanting power of words and objects, will determine the wider contribution of this thesis. From this perspective, it is within the detail of the local, then, that the import of the global (‘bigger picture’) resides. The extent to which the opposite is also true – while not a central concern of the ethnography presented here – remains an important question to bear in mind, especially if this research were to be drawn into a much more directly comparative conversation with ethnographies of other religions, economies, nations and so on.

Incommensurable realities and the incommensurable Word

Finally, let me admit to one last possible complication. It is not a new complication, indeed, it formed much of my argument of the early chapters of this thesis, namely that there are many different ‘villages’ within Gamrie which are ‘populated’ by a range of different people who themselves hold seemingly incommensurable ultimate values. Gamrie’s Christians appear caught between the local and the global, inhabiting, as they do, a world of black and white within a world of shades of grey. Gamrie’s teenagers, by and large, seem more interested in enjoying money, cars and alcohol than they do in committing to ‘a life of Gospel obedience’. Many of Gamrie’s middle aged ‘English incomers’ devote themselves to the visual arts – to painting and sculpture and photography – which, given the heavy logocentric bias of the local religion, is a passion not entirely shared by the churches. Gamrie’s summer residents appear drawn to the village because of its natural beauty and diverse wildlife, with many valuing a version of environmentalism that sits awkwardly with the (economic and religious) ‘calling’ of many local Christian fishermen. Gamrie’s subculture of bikers, influenced by the message and lifestyle of punk rock, is perhaps most at odds with the somewhat puritanical outlook of Gamrie’s chaste and (almost entirely) teetotal Christians.

What are we to do with this plurality? Does the lived reality of the ‘triple pinch’, as described in Chapter II, not take us back to the beginning of this conclusion, namely to a disenchanted polytheism stripped of its ‘inwardly genuine plasticity’ (Weber 1978a: 148)? It seems not, especially where we recognise, as Jenkins (2000) argues we must, that enchantment and disenchantment are entirely inseparable. What the Christian experience of Gamrie shows us is the ‘irreconcilable ultimate values’ of modernity pushed, in an apparently dialectical relationship, to its outer extremes. Boats named after Biblical themes provoke a boat to be named ‘Evolution’. The expectation that Sunday (as ‘the Lord’s Day’) be kept as a day of quiet rest encourages groups of bikers to time their thunderous descent down the village brae to coincide with the start of the morning Church services.

Yet there is also convergence. The Christians of Gamrie enjoy the patterns of ‘modern’ consumption that their religion leaves open to them – they eat well, dress well, drive expensive cars and take luxury foreign holidays. Weber’s point is made again, but perhaps not quite in the way he would have expected. Insofar as the religion of Gamrie is undoubtedly a ‘book religion’ heavily invested in ‘doctrine’ (Weber 1978c: 351), then it is not surprising that it also shares some wider hallmarks of modernity as he saw it, especially where these things remain attached not to the lavish hedonism of what local people called ‘the sins of the flesh’ but to the rather less sensual (if equally material) ‘signs’ of success at ones ‘calling’, that is, as a diligent and skilful fisher of prawns and men.

We are left, as in much of the thesis, with, if not a straightforward oppositional dualism, then certainly a somewhat incommensurable duality – that of an enchanted Christian world shaped by the immanence and imminence of transcendence, that, in many respects, is forced to orbit around a larger context of social, economic and demographic disenchantment. An enchanted world lived within an increasingly disenchanted village; enchanted words spoken by a disenchanted language; enchanted objects held within a disenchanted materiality. But it is not only the differing ‘worlds’ of enchantment and disenchantment that exist as incommensurable realities in Gamrie. Indeed, as we have seen, words too can be incommensurable and so too can objects. Crucially, it is their incommensurability, in terms of their inability and unwillingness to compromise with their source of ‘ultimate value’ (Weber 1978a. Also Lambek 2008) that determines their relations to other worlds with other values. Where it is ‘The Word’ that exists as the utterly uncompromising object of ‘ultimate value’ for the Christians of Gamrie, all that falls outside its orbit is demonic and therefore incommensurable. Yet, if the experience of my friend Mark who conquered his illiteracy shows us anything, it is that, for Gamrie’s Christians, it is not just familiarity with words, but a certain kind of ‘sincere’ (Keane 2002) and ‘committed’ (Howell 2007) literacy that is required. What was said to be needed was a literacy that allowed ‘The Word’ to enchant the world by consubstantiating the material and linguistic dimensions of life in such a way that the signs and referents that made up local people’s religious experiences were conflated and thereby became enchanted indexes of the immanence and imminence of ‘The Word’ in everyday life.

To the extent that – as with immanence and transcendence – enchantment and disenchantment are inseparable, it remains telling that many of my Christian informants themselves recognised this as true of their experience. On one of my last visits to Billy and Betty’s house before I finally left the village, I found both of them to be in as dejected a mood as I ever saw them. ‘I sometimes wonder if God has just *abandoned* this village, ken. I *canna* see nae future for *any* of the fellowships in the village. I do sometimes wonder if God has just *abandoned* us’ Betty told me with a pained smile. Where enchantment was experienced by local Christians in terms of the immanence and imminence of God and the Devil through words and objects, that is, it was experienced in terms of divine presence, then, perhaps a locally appropriate formulation of disenchantment would not be that the people have forgotten God, but that God has forgotten – that is, has ‘abandoned’ – the people. To the extent that such a conflation is anthropologically possible, this might point us towards a new type of enchantment, or, what we might want to call the re-enchantment of disenchantment.

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